



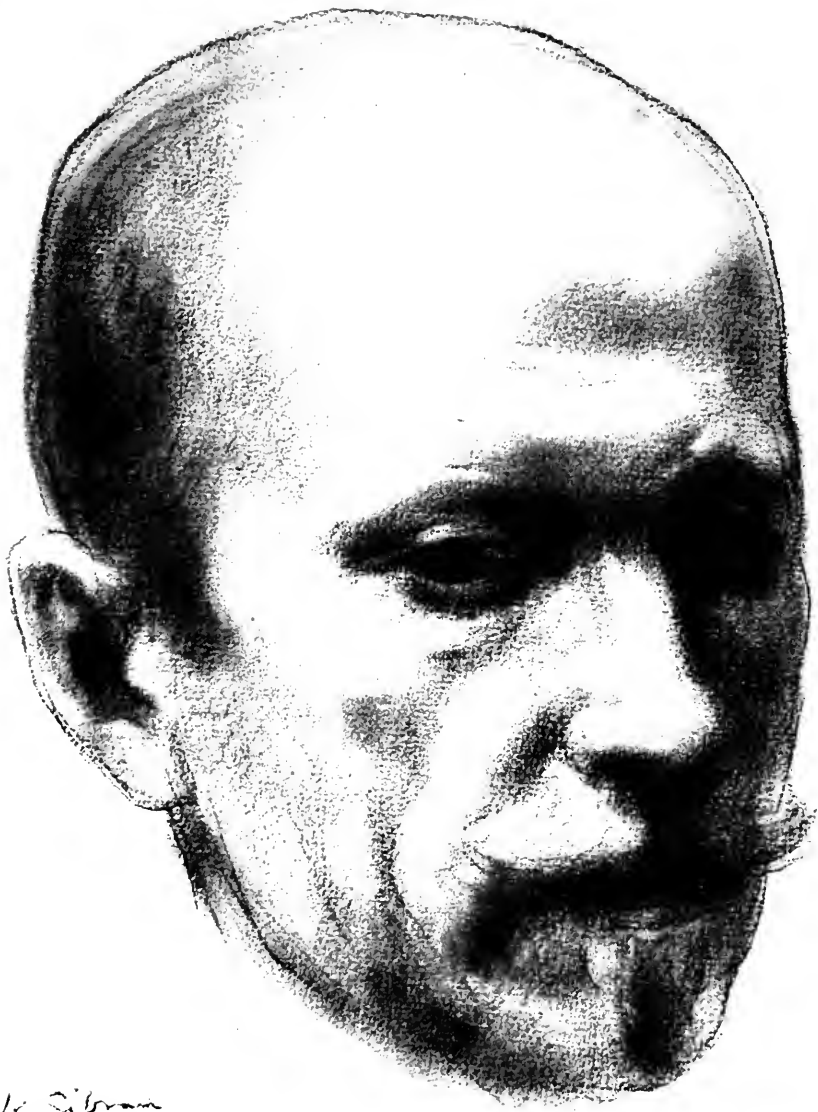
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**JOHAN BOJER**  
**THE MAN AND HIS WORKS**







K. G. J. Bojer  
1922

JOHAN BOJER



# JOHAN BOJER

THE MAN AND HIS WORKS

BY  
CARL GAD

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY  
ELIZABETH JELLIFFE MACINTIRE

*With an introduction by*  
LLEWELLYN JONES

*and critiques by*  
JOHN GALSWORTHY, JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER  
JAMES BRANCH CABELL AND CECIL ROBERTS



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## FOREWORD

BY CARL GAD

**J**OHAN BOJER is but forty-five years old. He stands upon his own merits and has attained a height of fame such as gives one the right to expect that the author has still a long and productive period in front of him. But the main features of this author's work are already clearly and sharply defined. From work to work one can trace the consistent development of his ideas, by means of which his personality achieves its definite and final victory. Through bitter doubt, through acrid criticism of false valuings, he fights his way through to a steadily stronger and brighter faith, until he has gone so far that, in the midst of an evil time, he has the courage to anticipate the victory of the good. And if one considers his writings in this light, one sees that they are not merely a succession of fine works of literary art, but are a positive and profound contribution to the spiritual life,

*giving expression, with firmness, and, in a distinguished manner, to a vision of human experience that, while bearing the imprint of his age, still definitely looks higher.*

*An examination of his theory of life, and of his artistic expression, is attempted in this study.*

## BOJER'S WORKS IN AMERICA

BY LLEWELLYN JONES

Literary Editor of the *Chicago Evening Post*

THE series of English translations of Johan Bojer's novels, of which *The Power of a Lie* is the fourth, was begun by Messrs. Moffat, Yard & Co., with *The Great Hunger* in 1919. *The Face of the World* followed in the same year, *Treacherous Ground* and *The Power of a Lie* were both published early in 1920, *Life* announced for later in the year, and now this biography.

To my certain knowledge there has been nothing parallel in the last ten years, and I doubt if ever a foreign author has been acclimatized so quickly. Some English authors have made a success in this country and then their earlier works have been given us in "collected" editions, but that is not a parallel case. Here is an author practically none of us not of Nor-

wegian birth or parentage has been able to read in the original, an author of whom few of us had even heard. He has had no advance publicity. One of his books is published; it is so successful that another is issued the same year — while the sales of the first go merrily on. A third and fourth follow, and his circle of readers enlarges steadily. He is not, like Ibanez, an already fairly well known but little read author who makes a hit by publishing a book dealing with the war, and then rides on the wave of its momentum. He is an artist who deals with the materials offered by his native country, and we read his books for no other reason than that they appeal to us on their intrinsic merits. And yet, in two years, we have so taken him into our hearts that biography is called for. It is an interest that certainly makes Bojer an American author by adoption.

How is it? I confess that the problem is almost insoluble apart from what a critic would naturally feel to be the desperate admission that the American reading public is a more intelligent, more truly feeling creature than we usually care to suppose.



For Bojer is at the opposite pole from *Pollyanna*, nor has he a single characteristic in common with Harold Bell Wright. Nor for that matter does he quite compete with them in point of sales — that would be too much like the literary millennium. But he does compete in point of sales with a great many of our native authors who are not quite so saccharine as the two above mentioned but who do write in a manner that is a compromise between art and what the ethically-minded American public believes in reading.

I think one reason for this success is the very creditable way in which American authors have expressed their own liking of Bojer's work. Just the other day, for instance, I read Zona Gale's praise of the beautiful ending of *The Great Hunger*. James Branch Cabell, Joseph Hergesheimer, and Gene Stratton-Porter have each spoken most highly of Bojer's work, and probably the words of each were hearkened to by a separate section of the reading public. Add to this the praise of John Galsworthy and of Blasco Ibanez, and it is obvious that any American reader must have been impressed be-

forehand with the fact that here was a novelist well worth attention.

And so we opened the pages of Bojer and began to read. It is at this point that the thing gets mysterious, for we have kept on reading, and it certainly takes more than the endorsements of other novelists to keep the public going in any one direction. Who is there that has not praised and recommended Henry James? And outside a very limited circle who is there that reads him? But we have kept on reading Bojer, and that in spite of a shock. For his books undoubtedly do shock the average American. I use the word shock, not in the sense of the sort of dismay which Cabell in playful mood produces in our too-maidenly breasts, but in the sense of that effect which a cold shower bath produces.

We read the first chapter of any book by Bojer and we see immediately that here is a novelist who deals with what we call ethical themes, with problems of conduct. *The Great Hunger* — we read. Ah! We draw a deep breath. With the perspicacity of spiritually minded people we can tell that this great hunger

is a spiritual hunger, and we revel in anticipation of one more justification of the ways of God to man. Perhaps we have already read *The Inside of the Cup*, and that later novel in which Mr. Churchill justifies not so much the ways of God as the ways of the I. W. W. to man. Certainly we feel, after the first chapter, that here is a novel serious in intent and clean cut in workmanship, quite free from that horrid Russian introspective sex-pathology which we dislike so much.

As we read on we note that our aesthetic sensibilities — if we have them — are charmed and satisfied. Bojer can tell a better story with more real character, with more vividly presented backgrounds, all in 300 pages than our own realists can tell in five or seven hundred. His stories have unity and form where our own writers are often not only content to give us a "slice of life," as they say, but never even to trim the edges.

Our human sensibilities, however, do receive a shock. Bojer is utterly sincere, and he will not justify the ways of God to us — or the ways of nature if there are any readers to whom the

word God is still a cause of intellectual offense — either by misrepresenting God or by assuming that he must be justified to the orthodox man or woman. Bojer strips us of all our social disguises. He knows that the way to peace, to spiritual adjustment, is through fire and travail. How many people who start to read “The Great Hunger” in optimism will willingly go all the way with its author and its hero — will, without inner protest, agree that Peer Holm did well when he found God and exchanged for him all that his youth had brought of health and strength, all the money that he had made, all his power over men, the life of his child, his assurance of daily bread. A healthy-minded, fairly well-off American, with the right amount of life insurance, would certainly be aghast at the road Peer Holm took Godward. “Found God?” he would exclaim, “why, the man is down and out!” And if one asked him if the first fact might not be worth while, even if it involved the truth of the latter, he would, if he were well enough informed, come back with “But what is pragmatism for? Doesn’t pragmatism get you to God by a better way than that? Or else

he might suggest that Peer Holm should have studied "New Thought."

My surprise at the bravery with which the American public as a whole has taken to Bojer and his bracing philosophy is partly due to the fact that I have spoken to some members of the reading public to whom his lack of sentimentality was a stumbling block. They thought him cruel and unyielding. His Norwegian snows chilled them, and they did not see that it is that very snow, pure and cold, that really makes us appreciate the light of the sun that shines upon it.

Somewhere in *Treacherous Ground* Bojer has used the phrase about the fresh warmth of the oncoming summer in the northern fjords of Norway that it is like "inhaling a mixture of sunshine and snow." And that figure is an almost perfect one for the enjoyment of all art. Take away the snow, and the sunshine is too warm; let the sunshine melt the snow, and we have muddy sentimentality. Bojer hates that sentimentality in life as well as in art, and his *Treacherous Ground* is a closely observed exposition of it in life. For, on the treacherous

ground of sentimentality, does Erik Evje build a foundation for his own happiness as well as for the happiness and security of others, and of course the ground gives way.

Would that our American novelists would treat us with such kindly roughness as does Bojer! Perhaps, emboldened by his success, they will try to work in the same manner. I am convinced that, to many of his readers, some of the charm of his work is that they cannot predict the course of his novels by *a priori* considerations. To illustrate, let us glance for a moment at Mr. Winston Churchill's *The Dwelling Place of Light*, in which a girl in humble circumstances gets a job in a New England woolen mill, has a love affair with the manager, joins the I. W. W., takes part in a strike, and then dies. Throughout the book the reader is always two jumps ahead of the author because he knows exactly what a serious-minded author like Mr. Churchill must and must not do. He knows that the manager's love advances to the girl will be of the sort known as "dishonorable" because American sentiment is on the whole against the obvious misalliance. He knows that the I. W.

W. will be treated in such and such a way because Mr. Churchill is a liberal who will not damn it utterly, but who, wishing to retain the good will of those to whom he appeals, will not exactly take its side (of course it is the pre-war I. W. W. that figures here), and saddest of all, the reader knows that the girl is going to die. He knows that the moment he sees she cannot marry the manager — he gets killed, if I remember aright — and that she is due to give birth to a child of which he was the father. Kind people take her in, and the child is born. But no respectable American novel could harbor a young woman, unmarried, with a living to earn, and a child to keep and explain. So the girl has to die. Not of any disease or by an accident, but just by fading away. There was no artistic necessity for it, and certainly none in physiology, but Mr. Churchill was writing sentimentally to please a sentimental public.

But how differently does Bojer handle things. How unsentimental is the figure of Peer Holm finding God at the expense of everything else. What a rebuke to sentiment there is in Erik Evje paying for his private sins by doing good

to people who did not ask him to come into their lives — doing them good until his good tumbles down in irretrievable disaster. And with what surgical calmness does Bojer show us the figure of Evje, himself unhurt by the catastrophe he has caused, his life and most of his land safe while other people's lives and lands have gone down together — Evje, standing over the wreckage, and lamenting, not the loss, not the dishonesty in himself that caused him to make these people a sacrifice for his own sins; but lamenting the fact that this disaster had hurt him — had robbed him of the protection that he had built against the assaults of his own conscience.

This lack of sentimentality does not imply brutality. For at the point we have mentioned the author leaves Evje, and ends his book with one of the characters, a farm worker, who had escaped from the disaster, a lad whom Evje, in his zeal for other people's righteousness, had persuaded to marry a girl whom he had wronged. But Lars had done this in spite of the fact that he loved another woman: well, if the reader has not seen the book I will not spoil his enjoyment of it by retelling the end, but for actual beauty



of human feeling, for unpretentious but real pathos, this ending is one of the most beautiful things that a novelist has done for a long time. Certainly few contemporary English-writing novelists have approached it.

It is a dangerous thing to sum up a novelist's contribution to us in terms of the philosophy he expresses. And yet the novel is the form that does, more than any other, deal with conduct and with world views. What saves Bojer's novels from being didactic and, therefore, misleading is his adherence to the great truth that there is no such thing as a science of ethics, but that there is such a thing as an art of conduct. You cannot make general rules of conduct, for every case has its not to be duplicated features. Human situations are not like the situations of geometry, infinitely repeatable. But the general "lie of the land" in the case of an author may, at least, be indicated roughly.

And in all four of these novels we see men trying this, that and the other patent medicine of conduct. They try to compound their secret sins not so much by damning those they are not inclined to as by trying to remedy their

effects — as did Evje — or they rely upon the justice of their “cause” — as Wangen in *The Power of a Lie* relied upon the fact of his innocence to excuse that in them which is not just and not innocent. Or, like Doctor Mark in *The Face of the World*, they try to find peace by taking the sins of the world upon their own too weak shoulders, and find that they cannot help the world, and that they have lost the strength that might, at least, have upheld their own loved ones who suffer while they agonize over suffering that they cannot stop. Dr. Mark may well be contrasted with Evje: a good man and a bad man each trying by almost the same means to find peace.

The typical Bojer novel may be said to exhibit a modern soul tortured with moral ideas, as Rolland said of Tolstoy; “sometimes, too, pregnant with a hidden god,” but always blundering toward an adjustment with the world, Blundering hopefully, but really, not finding a chart as our ethical teachers would assure us is possible, but finding that there is no chart and that we must keep on blundering until, by trial and error, we make our own adjustment

to life. After all it is the method of all human advance. Science is the finding of things out by experiment, and an experiment is simply a success following a number of blunders. If the world were really what homilists try to assure us it is, science would be unnecessary because we could deduce all knowledge from *a priori* principles. And the novelists of piety have their *a priori* principles of charity and fidelity and courage and truth-telling, and, like Harold Bell Wright, begin with those abstractions and clothe them in human garments.

So Bojer shows us the futility of charts and the great perils of self-deception. We keep our souls by eternal vigilance and by feeding them upon the bread of the moment. Dr. Mark ends by embracing love and taking all that he can get from the world's stores — the philosophy of Jesus as well as the music of Beethoven. And Peer Holm sows his neighbor's field "that God may exist."

And Peter Wangen, disdaining the spiritual food of his wife's love when he is under the cloud of a false accusation, becoming self-righteous because he knows that he is innocent,

overdraws his account. He asks too much from that little stock of innocency — as if thousands of men, though not falsely accused, were not just as innocent as he was. He overdraws and spends lavishly. He becomes wicked, that is to say, bankrupt of virtue, because he magnifies the virtue that is maligned by Knut Norby's accusation of forgery against him. He makes the accusation almost a true one by becoming a forger. And Norby, tortured by his conscience for his misdeed — for he had not intended to accuse Wangen of forgery until chance set the rumor going and so suggested this sin to him — Norby, so tortured as long as Wangen is a helpless adversary, is hardened in his course and relieved of remorse when Wangen begins falsely to accuse him, to ascribe to him motives for the injury that were far from his mind. Then, when public opinion lets Norby know that it is behind him, that it considers him an honest man traduced by a blackguard, Norby actually forgets he was anything but an honest man, he expands in the smiles of approval, and actually does become a better man than he had ever been before, simply because he feeds on the spiritual

food that is brought to him on the winds of circumstance.

That the food was stolen, that he was not innocent, is what will shock the sentimental reader, as it has shocked Hall Caine who writes an introduction for this latest novel. That is because Hall Caine believes that life is a charted affair, that setting a certain course always brings you to a certain destination, and he cannot see how the course of evil brings Norby to the destination of good. But Bojer knows that the world as such is amoral, uncharted. Stolen money is as likely to earn a safe six per cent as money that was toiled for. Nature is not a justice of the peace, and she does not protect the Wangens because they are honest or punish the Norbys because they are dishonest. Both the Norbys and the Wangens reward or punish themselves. Wangen was weak. In his trouble he leaned on the outside fact of his innocence, just as Mark, a good man, and Evje, a bad man, tried to lean on the outside facts of Socialism and philanthropy. They all three found that outside facts are likely to fail us.

Norby was ethically in the wrong, but he did

not squeal or run after sympathy. He faced his sin in his own bosom until the tactics of the innocent aroused his fighting blood. He was a scoundrel, undoubtedly, but he was not trying to live above his ethical means: he did not try to overdraw his moral account. He does not beg spiritual sympathy — and lo, it comes flooding in upon and makes him virtuous in spite of himself.

That is rather bitter teaching for our nation of well-intentioned people. It was too bitter for Mr. Hall Caine, and he frankly says so in his introduction.

But when one reflects upon the unique reception which the work of Bojer has had in America, one wonders whether we are not beginning to grow up, whether our reading public is not ceasing to be juvenile or adolescent, and becoming mature. Certainly that large proportion of it which is reading Bojer will never again be satisfied with sentimentality in fiction. They will have seen how even the most ethical aspects of life, the most pressing “problems” of conduct, may be made the subject matter of novels at once utterly sincere in their approach to life,

beautifully proportioned in their massing of background, circumstances, and character, and psychologically honest and significant in their illumination of the depths of the human soul.





## JOHAN BOJER AND KAHLIL GIBRAN

THIS small volume, devoted to the study of a man whom critics have proclaimed the most significant writer to come out of Scandinavia since Henrik Isben, is an endeavor to give to that ever-growing host of Bojer students a panorama picture of Bojer's literary development. Primarily it is a study of Johan Bojer's writings, but I believe that when one reads the comments of Mr. Gad and Mr. Llewellyn Jones, or the critiques of Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Cabell, one will turn to the frontispiece by Kahlil Gibran with realization that what these able writers have done with their pens finds a marvelously intelligent companion-piece in the drawing of Gibran.

Kahlil Gibran, the painter and poet of Lebanon, aroused my sincere admiration some years ago by his book of poems, *The Madman*. As I sat in his studio one day last April, on the occasion of Bojer's first visit to America, and

saw him dip into the soul of the man who had written *The Great Hunger*, and produce in high light and shadow this likeness upon his drawing board, I knew that Gibran's genius was two-fold — the poet and artist were inseparable.

"This is an unusual face," declared Gibran.

"So many hills and valleys!" replied Bojer.

Bojer was manifestly nervous. He folded and unfolded his hands as he talked — and his talk was mostly about fairy tales, tales of his own saga that declared his kinship with Hans Andersen. He told us stories as he sat and as Gibran drew. He was infinitely embarrassed and was difficult to pose. The sitting lasted more than an hour, and when it was over Bojer stood before the drawing with his hands behind his back, balancing himself upon his toes. Turning to Gibran, he said:

"You are a sculptor. Your work should be in marble! Your drawing resembles works by Michelangelo and Rodin."

Certainly those who know Bojer the man, who have felt the power of the restless, dynamic force that pervades his being, will find in this drawing a study of infinite power and penetrating

character analysis. For those who love him as the writer who knows men's hearts, who understands life's ironies, and whose belief in Man makes possible the universal popularity of his translations, they too will see in the Gibran drawings these self-same things.

HOWARD WILLARD COOK

July 9th, 1920



JOHAN BOJER  
THE MAN AND HIS WORKS



# JOHAN BOJER

## THE MAN AND HIS WORKS

### THE BOYHOOD OF BOJER

**J**OHAN BOJER was born March 6, 1872, at Orkedalsoren near Trondhjem. He, like Strindberg, was the son of a servant girl; and as his mother could not keep him with her, he was put out to nurse in the country. The greater part of his childhood was passed at Rissen on the other side of the fiord, at the house of a cottager, on the estate of Reinsklostret, Elias Faetten by name; and there he grew up, under the conditions of the children of that part. He fished in the fiord, tended cattle in the fields in summer, and went once a week to school, to stay two days. On Sundays, he went to service with the grown-ups; and, in the evenings, in front of the open fire, he heard Mother Randi tell fairy tales and stories of the trolls like those

that Bojer later fathered under the title of *Gamle Historier* (Old Tales). Mother Randi, herself, had seen these little people and believed firmly in them.

When Johan was fifteen years old, he found a way to go to Dybdahl's country school, and there he heard, for the first time, that there was something called literature and poetry. Dybdahl himself was, as Bojer said, "a fire and a brand," and when he read *Peer Gynt*, his hearers wept copiously.

The course was short, and, at its conclusion, Bojer took service with a prosperous farmer named Andreas Fallin, where he had opportunity to observe the workings of politics from a point of vantage. There took place, for example, the great meetings of electors, which are described in *Et Folketog* (The Procession), where Ullman began his speech with such force that a cat "ran into the woods and never afterwards was seen there again." Bojer's reading consisted of the Bible and the *Parliamentary Gazette*. In the hours he had to himself he began to write psalms, and, when alone in the woods, he delivered political speeches to the trees and bushes.



The impulse to pursue his studies farther soon became too strong for him, so at eighteen years of age, he gained admission to a school for non-commissioned officers at Trondhjem, where one got not only instruction, but also keep and clothing free. In the three years of his attendance there, he was ever busy gathering knowledge. He read English with a hotel porter — who, later, was sent to prison for murder — and he went assiduously to the public lectures in the city, where, among other things, there was a course in the history of European literature given by the head master Richter, who, later, became Johan's critic and friend.

While he was in Trondhjem, he heard two lectures by Herman Bang and Knut Hamsun that made a powerful impression upon him, and clarified for him his visions and his desires for the future. Until this time he had quite definitely thought of being a farm owner in some pretty place — also of being a sergeant, who might perhaps, in war time, advance to the rank of general. But, now, both of these ambitions were overshadowed by a greater idea — to become a poet.

Temporarily, that had to be the lure of the future, for he had to devote himself to earning a livelihood. After leaving the military school, he took a commercial course, and pursued, in the following years, various occupations; as fisherman among the Lofot Islands, as first commissioner, and as sewing machine agent. For part of the time he had a position with a business house in Trondhjem, but he fitted ill in such a place. He studied French grammar in office time, and wrote poetry in odd moments. He would spend nights in planning plays and novels, in consequence of which his head was heavy for the next day's work, and his account books were in sad disorder.

In these years his first two books were produced, the play, *En Moder* (A Mother), 1894, and the story, *Helga* (1895), which tells of a young man who steals to help his mother, and kills himself when it is discovered. This was played at Trondhjem by the Swedish producer Engelbrecht. It did particularly well, and brought the author 600 kronen. *Helga* was also quite well received. It is a story of the Trondhjem district, not specially distinguished

or original, but natural in tone, and with a sure style.

Bojer had now become an author, definitely, and, with his first honorarium in his purse, he went on a long trip, first to Copenhagen, and then to Paris. When the money was used up, he traveled with Obstfelder on foot to Amsterdam, from where they got home by sailboat. They slept under haystacks and ate little, but, in the cities of Belgium and Holland, they enriched themselves with art — Obstfelder explaining, and Bojer learning.

The next winter, Bojer was in Copenhagen, where he wrote correspondence for a Trondhjem advertiser at five kronen apiece. He also gave lectures at Hoffding and ValdVedel, and spent much of his time in the Imperial library. In the summer of 1896, he returned to Norway penniless, but got a position in his home town of Rissen, where he could live practically without expense. It was there that he wrote *Et Folketog*, but in order to get to Christiania to find a publisher, he had literally to pawn his belongings piecemeal. But when he got there, the novel was quickly accepted; it created a sensa-

tion, and was recognized on all sides, especially after Arne Garborg had praised it in high terms. It soon ran into a second edition; the borrowed money was repaid, and the future assured again for a time.

During the following years he brought out the fairy tale collections, *Paa Kirkeveei* (At the Churchyard Gate) 1897, and *Rorfloiterne* (The Wind in the Reeds) 1898, of which the first ran to four, the second to two editions. These tales are uneven both in tone and value, a number of them carelessly written, but the others deserve to be read for the idea, or the lyrical expression. There are very few of them that come up to the standard of the later collection, *White Birds* (1904, *Hvide Fugle*). Besides these Bojer wrote, at this time, two plays, *Granholmen* (Island of the Dead, 1895) and *Hellig Olav* (Saint Olof, 1897) which, however, do not deserve special mention.

Bojer married in 1899 Ellen Lange, daughter of Colonel Lange, and their children were, Thora, born 1902, Landi Faetten (named after Bojer's beloved foster-mother), born 1903, and Halvard, born 1905. During these years he led a wander-

ing life. He lived five years in France, three in Italy, and also spent considerable time in Denmark, in Germany, and in England. It was not till 1907 that he took firm root in Norway, living at first, for two years, at Gjovik near Mjosen, then two years at Baekkelaget, near Christiania, and, finally, for his health's sake, four years at Harpefoss in Gudbrandsdalen. In 1915 he bought a piece of land at Hvalstad, a couple of miles south of Christiania, and there he built himself a house, and set up a permanent home.

Bojer only writes during the summer. In the winter, he studies: the thirst for knowledge, which, in his youth, drove him on, has never been slaked, and he has, in the course of the years, gathered for himself a profound and extensive erudition. He is learned in many unusual lines, not least of all, in the classic literature of the country.

The three male characters in Bojer's work that cast most light upon the author have all one essential trait in common. Of the painter Tangen, in *Liv* (Life), who is most thoroughly representative, it is said that he had "the desire and

chance to be young when he got to his later years." Sigurd Braa says of himself: "I was oldish when I was twenty, read Latin when I was thirty, and went to dancing school in my forties. Next year I shall really be young." And when Peer Holm in *Den Store Hunger* (The Great Hunger) comes home from Egypt and marries, the story tells us that the youth that had no chance of freedom between twenty and thirty must finally, one day, break loose.

There is, about these three men, for whom youth comes as an Indian summer, something exuberantly powerful in the long dammed-up feelings that finally overflow their banks; they have a sense of having much to make up for, and so their appetite for life becomes devouring.

There is, undoubtedly, something of the author in this trait. Bojer had a hard struggle when young. All that most people learn when they are children he had to acquire as a young man, and the hard fight to get along and force his way could not but put its mark on him. And moreover, his generation's whole spiritual coin was quite other than what would purchase youthful joy of living. Dr. Holth in *Liv* (Life)

has a reply, which rings strongly subjective: "You see, Miss Riis" (he says to Astrid), "your generation has eyes much freer to see beauty with, than mine had. We grew up with Zola and Ibsen, and the truths we learned to value were painful and unpleasant. Now I see with amazement that all that time the apple trees and the dropping sorrel were covered with blossoms every single year. In all the abstract problems we young people dwelt in the midst of there was never one green blade."

Bojer's own work had been, for many years, marked by the discussion of abstract problems, but when he first, for good and all, lifted his eyes to the blooming apple trees and the beauty of the sorrel, he grew intoxicated with rapture, and every book that he wrote grew richer and fuller of the joy of beauty.

Bojer's work is full of contrasts. Light and shade are deeply underscored, so strongly that one is tempted to divide his books into "bright" and "dark." His work falls naturally into three periods, and in the two first, the gloomy element is, by far, the more prominent. In the first period, he limns chiefly politicians, and analyzes

the bringing about of political ruin, and in the next period, he elaborates and extends the same problems in other realms, and paints personalities who, in one fashion or another, fail and go to pieces. In both periods, it is true, we find bright characters, but it is not until the third period that these become the predominant element. Joy of living and optimism win the victory, and his writing now takes on the air of a hymn that celebrates the mercy and generosity in men's hearts.



## II

### SOCIAL CRITICISM

THE first of Johan Bojer's books that assumes a likeness of lasting worth is the novel *Et Folketog* (1896). This book is a sign manual of his right to be ranked as author, and together with his two succeeding novels, *Den Evige Krig* (1899) and *Moder Lea* (1900) it makes up, in a natural sequence the first group of his writings — novels of social criticism. All three are concerned with the antagonism of politics to labor.

*Et Folketog* — an amazingly mature and assured piece of work for a writer of but twenty-four years of age — pictures the political struggle in a Vestland parish, and analyses its effect upon the farmer Peter Hegge, upon his home, and upon the whole district.

Hegge himself was a well-meaning idealist who believed in the great aims of democracy, and felt a call to enter personally into the

fight against all the poverty and wrong in the land. But, at the same time, he was practical enough to understand that direct work for bettering the conditions of life for the peasant was more interesting and worth while than the great platform points — universal suffrage and a separate minister for foreign affairs. He determined therefore, that when he got into Parliament, he would, first and foremost, work to bring about one achievement — free loans for farmers.

This loan, and more especially what he would accomplish in Parliament, became his constant dream. Hegge determined that he would do great and honorable acts, and gain justly a reputation as an upright, great-souled character. But, in order to be elected, it was, alas, necessary to go crooked ways and to make use of many petty means. Hegge found himself dragged into these inevitably. The nearer election day approached, and the more hotly he pursued the campaign, the more firmly he became bound by promises and pledges that he knew could never be fulfilled, and the more wretched his conscience made him.

Thus, however, Hegge made his way into

Parliament. But if he had not been a free man in his actions before, he was now forever bound. "The psychological moment" to introduce the proposal of the loan obviously never arrived, and Peter Hegge quickly learned that he must knuckle down to the "interests of the party." And what else was there really to do? His very position was at stake if he ventured to take his own way! So he gave up every thought of practical politics, and when the next election came, he talked no more about interest, free loans, timber laws, and fishing laws, but fell, like the others, into phrase-making, and spoke great words about supporting the party — for the fatherland's sake.

At the same time that Peter Hegge's character was being undermined and his personality lost in a maze of words and sterile tactics, his home affairs also went wrong.

He had no time to attend to the care of the farm, because reports and meetings filled his days. And so it came about that the political struggle was followed by a financial one. In order to stand well with people he had to sign notes for them when they wanted to borrow

money from the bank of which he was director. But his opponent, Bergheimen, who was the richest man of the parish, had money out on mortgage in various farm properties, and by causing the ruin of first one and then another farmer, brought it to pass that Hegge must sell his farm in order to pay up the notes he had endorsed.

Together with the financial wreck, politics brought unhappiness into the home itself. When Peter Hegge and his wife, Gunhild, became alienated from one another it was clearly evident that the cause lay in an extrinsic circumstance. The youngest child fell sick of pneumonia and died before the doctor came. Gunhild could not forgive her husband for the fact that she had to stand alone at the child's death bed, and that even the physician could not be secured quickly enough because the father was away on political business. But the event was, in reality, only a symbol of the fact that she must be alone in everything that was to be done in the home, since he neglected all else for the sake of public interests.

This lack of family interest showed itself also

upon the other children. The son Anders grew up a good-for-naught, and the daughter, Kristine, the book's one fine and bright character, was sacrificed inexorably. The father's politics and the financial difficulties he had met with, had delivered him into the clutches of the old and, in every respect, uninviting color-sergeant, Mo. He demanded, in payment of the debt, Kristine as wife, and got her — there was no other way out.

The plot's final development shows how a taint affects the whole parish, bringing about decay and disintegration, enmity, strife, estrangements because of politics extending into every relation of life. Public affairs take up a preposterous and disproportionate amount of time and thought. "The Controlling Party," says one of the few far-seeing characters in the book, Schoolmaster Trong, "is so constantly busy with seventeenth of May speeches and national hymns that they are almost ashamed to mention anything so prosaic as farming or dairy management."

The leaders went about in the parish and talked of the fatherland with their hands in

their pockets. Instead of taking the lead in up-to-date methods and business-like, solid work, they subjugate everything — as Hegge with his interest-free loan — to the party and its support. All really useful matters were laid on the table and came to nothing. Thus, for instance, when a new mill was needed, which would be of inestimable value to the parish if one could only get the plans made, other things were proposed and the plans were forgotten.

The bitter mood of the book is fully expressed at last by a symbol — artistically speaking, a strained and very unsuccessful one. After a great public meeting the politicians sail away down the river to the sound of singing and music. Each believed the other was looking out for the rapids. It is Björnson, who sings: "Put your all into the nearest call."

In the meantime they drove blindly on, and only discovered the danger when it was too late. And then it appeared that no one would jump out, all wanted to row. They fought among themselves and many were injured, while the rowboat glided on — a symbol for the parish or for Norway — steadily towards the rapids.

If *Et Folketog* is a bitter book for parliamentary devotees to read, *Den Evige Krig* is so in a still higher degree.

The chief personage, the estate owner Samuel Brandt, is a character of the same sort as Peter Hegge, but from another class of society.

He began with the most upright intentions and the most ardent desire to fight for honest measures. Belief in democracy was his religion, and he threw himself into the agitation with a truly religious fervor. But things went with him as with Hegge; his character suffered in the fight.

The first time he talked at a public meeting, he was carried away by mob-feeling and felt ashamed of himself afterward as a liar, and swore never again to mount a platform. The next day he was sneered at and lashed at in the Conservative papers. He thought this right and proper, and he was angry at the comments of the radical paper, *The Future*. Afterwards, however, when he thought over the articles in the Conservative papers, he came to have a sense of injury, and, at the same time, to be better pleased with his

speech. The sense of affront grew, the more he thought about it, until he finally became so bitter against the Conservatives that he made up his mind to set out on a regular speaking tour. Thus the trend of things was changed.

In the Conservative papers Samuel Brandt was persecuted, and each speech was distorted, but he was, at the same time, praised to the heavens by *The Future*. It became more and more impossible for him, in this exciting life, to maintain restraint and independence in his convictions, and little by little, he became sucked into the great, fatal whirlpool of party fanaticism.

But Brandt is constantly racked with doubt and uncertainty. He is robbed by practical politics, little by little, of all his faith in the party and its mission, and later, as minister, having pursued a hopeless fight against the spoil system and stupidity in "the practical layman's sense," he returned home to Lindegard a defeated and broken man.

While the radical Brandt was pursuing his political gods, his own estate fell into decay.



In this case, too, "the human sacrifice" was not avoided; it was the sister Sarah, who — a small improbability — gave up her own chance of happiness in order to attend to her brother's home and child, while he went into politics.

That Samuel Brandt is considered the chief character in *Den Evige Krig* is only because, on account of the book's temper, he is brought somewhat more strongly forward than the others, and because he is examined more as to mental processes. But there are a number of other characters who lay claim, with perhaps equal right, to as much space and interest.

There is, first, the laborer, Jansen. He had, while apprentice, been sent to prison because, half dead from hunger, he had stolen a couple of young chickens. His parents died of shame and sorrow, the girl he loved married another man, and Jansen felt himself to be an outcast from society. After many years of sailing the sea, and when no one longer remembered him, he married, but bitterness had become rooted in his heart by this time, and he developed into a passionate and sullen agitator against the existing social system.

Then he met Samuel Brandt and his bitterness was conquered by the latter's friendliness and human sympathy. He gave up the agitations and found happiness in his home, but this did not last long. Soon he re-entered politics, because the radical leaders who had seen that he was useful, made advances and flattered him into taking a share in the party's work.

Jansen became a member of Parliament. There are long speeches made about his many excellences and his high virtue as a man. At the same time there is much talk about democracy as the party of brotherly love, which carries out "Christ's own will" both for the small and the great in society. The time seems ripe to Jansen to ease his conscience and tell of the dark blot on his childhood.

Such an instance had come to Bojer's own ears. In 1893 the laborer, Hagerup, was elected member of Parliament at Trondhjem, strongly supported by the radical press. He also had been in prison when young, and when he was naïve enough, relying on the humanity of the party, to confess to this, they threw him over completely. Bojer, who knew Hagerup, was

greatly upset by the lack of generosity that was shown on all sides, and one can see the indignation still burning in this book, where he pictures the fate of Jansen.

The whole thing is treated as a party affair; it is a matter of concern that the Conservative papers shall not make capital of this to attack the party, and therefore, they hastened to be rid of him. *The Future* represented him as a cunning imposter who had deceived everyone. The scandal took on mighty dimensions, and, branded as a criminal, Jansen is driven out into wretchedness, utterly crushed. The party is the pearl without price — whatever brings stain upon it, must be sacrificed.

Unscrupulous party opportunism is personified in the editor, Sokrates Hector Snorre Kahrs. He is Bojer's "perfect type" of politician, conspicuously talented, with no other passion than ambition, and with an unusually cold-blooded scorn of mankind. Every man was, for him, either a voter or one who could influence a voter. He knew everybody in the town, their family relations, abilities, possessions, money, vices, ambitions, and he knew how they must be handled,

whether flattered or threatened. He had a well-organized staff of political job hunters under him who, like subscription collectors, received little commissions for each vote they procured. But his most powerful tool was his paper. As he would make speeches on everything between heaven and earth, from poultry breeding and protective tariff to love affairs and Jesus Christ — so he treated in his paper all themes — and used them for political purposes. He was practically omnipotent in the town, and used his power without scruple. Pastor Borg understood this: to have *The Future* against one — that meant an empty church and poor collections, distractions in work, insult, and scorn. And he adjusted himself to the situation after this, and affected a reconciliation with the paper. Then — behold! the church grew full again. Thanks to newspaper publicity, the offerings increased, and the agitations were smoothed down, until the sense of his own falsity at last drove him to the fjord.

It is the paper, that is to say, Kahrs, that brought about his end, and so with one and another. The town acquired his stamp by de-

grees, as well as the political struggle in which he was leader.

Kahrs declared that a powerful wedge must be used to conquer the old conservative town. Platforms and things of that sort were not enough. It would be far better to bring about a little personal enmity between man and man.

Success marked the venture in the House, and at election time, which, every three years, descended on the town like a hail storm on summer flowers. A sort of epidemic of bitterness and hate was disseminated from man to man. The political difference of opinion grew to a practical burgher war in miniature. Old friendships were sundered, family divisions arose, and it came to be clenched fist against clenched fist in every sphere of action.

“The spirit of the press, with its whole and half lies, roguery, equivocal words, and its hasty, implacable enmities — more and more, like a clammy, winter blight, overlaid all true and happy community life, all fresh youth, and unqualified gladness and contentment. This smouldered between school children and teachers, it reeked from cellar to garret, it entered

into business affairs, it knocked down banker and credit, it reached the pastor in the church, and took hold of the affairs of the Exchange. It breathed in every home, and even stood beside graves and cast in the first clump of earth upon the dead."

Hegge and Samuel Brandt were the tragic political figures, Jansen the martyr, and Kahrs the master.

In *Moder Lea* we meet the fool and rascal. In the two first books, politics appear chiefly as enmities, here it is seen chiefly in its public characters: its two representatives, Hakon Hakonsen and Hans Lunde, are both impressed with the idea that their *milieu* lies in public life rather than in the less strenuous pursuits of the private individual.

Already in *Et Folketog* Bojer had made an attempt to exhibit the effect of this craving for publicity on a man. The doctor tells, for example, of his own children: "One strives at art because his call goes in the direction of making sorry verses about the joy of life and freedom and the fatherland, really impossible stuff, I assure you. And the other does not finish at

the technical school because he is wasting his time and money on something erudite. Is it, however, because their talent drives them? Oh no. The fact is they wish to be famous, they will not be so terribly deadly as father is. Isn't it natural this should make me bitter against the age, whose fault it is? For my two are not the only ones. There is a sickness upon the young people of today, a sickness which our public life has bred. Now, I myself, played a violin indifferently when I was a young chap, you remember that yourself. But I did it entirely in secret and because music then had the most interest for me. Now, every little aptitude must be placed on exhibition and developed into the chief business of life; people want to be famous. To create something actually worth while, to please father and mother, and sacrifice a little fame to gladden them, oh, no — don't ask that. Youth has too much talent, too many 'calls,' to work, and is ambitious, for the fatherland's sake, to unite in a peaceful and fruitful work. The young people realize that, in order to be famous, one must be either an artist or a politician in this country."

The same trend toward publicity we see in Anders Hegge with his "call" to be editor, to found an alliance of the youth of the country for the doing of something. And we see it again in Jens Nordseth, though, be it admitted, in somewhat more complicated fashion. He deserts his love because he wants to be an artist and so cannot be married to a peasant girl, and when his home is ruined and desolate, and his parents have been obliged to take a position as gate-keeper to the farm's new owners, this ruin is for him only a theme — for a painting that may make him famous.

In Hakon Hakonsen's and Hans Lunde's characters this idea is developed yet further. They both suffered from a distinct misapprehension of the difference between what they are and what they think they are, and what they strive for is not to produce something actual, which would bring them real reason for pride, but rather to make themselves a subject of public talk.

Hakon Hakonsen is the worse of the two. All his life was absorbed in winning recognition and pleasure. In his youth he had tried one thing



and another; spiritual life, art, religion, anarchism, but recognition for his talent had not come, and he was at a loss to know what expedient to attempt by which to become a great man. At this juncture he discovered that politics was the way. He fastened on "Norway" and "cut his cloth according to his pattern." He worked for the peasants that they might "call their souls their own" — or he talked town projects and spoke platitudes about culture just as he might mention that the wind was blowing. All the while, he was going about pretending to say something bold and profound and looking for recognition, but because of his merely coquettish desire to please, he rigged himself out theatrically like a peasant, in real museum clothes, and like a "man of culture" in elegant dress. He ended as a minister of the church.

Hans Lunde is somewhat more complex. He was poorly brought up, that is to say, even as a child he was allowed to follow his own inclination, which is to avoid all hard things. Not unlike Peer Gynt, he constantly allowed his thoughts to wander to something amusing instead of using to advantage the talents he had.

At the age of twenty Hans had failed three times in the grammar school examinations. His people then wanted him to go to an agricultural school, but he had a wide-awake instinct for what would suit him best, and went to an art school instead.

Like Anders Hegge he started a club in order to have a place to talk. Because he had discovered, "a person can get out of any difficulty, if only he can speak for himself," and that it was an excellent way to talk round a thing instead of really delving deep into it.

The three great experiences life brought him, led him all the farther along this same course.

The first one was that he discovered that his mother was in love with the Swedish helper on her farm. In the beginning, Hans was in doubt — did not know what to do; then he fancied himself killing the Swede and heard himself making a brilliant apologetic discourse to the judge and becoming famous. It came finally to him that he had experienced something wonderful that would develop him, perhaps make him a great writer, and bring him public applause and wide fame.

“As soon as he thought of this he sat down with pencil and note book and tried to set down his grief in a couple of verses in the national tongue.” Several days later, the youth had thought of a number of plans, which he greatly admired himself for, but which he delayed putting into execution.

Then the Swede killed his father — apparently through an accident when driving — and later married his mother, and Hans, who was the only one that knew the dreadful truth, stood in Hamlet’s position. He decided to devote his life to having the crime disclosed and the murderer punished. But this would occasion considerable hard work, and so he finds very soon all sorts of fine excuses for putting this off.

The two men then learn to live beside each other on the farm, each with his guilty consciousness — the Swede because of the crime he had committed, and Hans because of the accusation he could not force himself to make.

And what is it Ase says in *Peer Gynt*:

*It is ghastly to see one’s evil destiny under  
one’s eyes,*

*And therefore will a man gladly shake off his sorrows*

*And try his best to get away from his thoughts of himself.*

*One tries brandy, another, lies —*

So it happened in this case; the Swede took to drinking cognac (later, to religion) and Hans to fine, stirring words. Hans had to fight a constantly harder fight to keep self-accusation under. He, therefore, made speeches about eternal peace, world-revolution, newly-established Norway, and King Sverre's legacy to youth. There is nothing that so shuts one's mind to himself as talking of others. Hans became a great speaker and intoxicated himself both by his own words and by the approval that streamed toward him. Even the pastor was finally so impressed by the oratory of Hans, that he had him sent as agent on a royal commission that demanded profound wisdom in its discharge.

Then it happened that the wife of the golden-tongued speaker, who understood the situation, and once had believed in his "mission," and wished to help him to perform it, came to know,

to the uttermost, his equivocations and indecision; and for fear that their child should grow up like his father, she killed it. To the judge she would make no other explanation than that the father was a coward.

She is sentenced to fifteen years in prison, while Hans is too weak to try to save her by any excuse. Again comes the struggle between his "two selves"; his own judgment of himself, and other people's judgment of him. Again it happened that his evil self conquered because of people's sympathy and respect for him — due to his fine speech-making. He had thrust upon him a halo of martyrdom because of his wife's crime. It heightened wonderfully his popularity, and he rose higher and steadily higher through the humbug of people's sentimentality.

Thus Hans became a prominent person in Parliament. None could get such a sweep of the ballots as he, and obtain exactly what he wished. "Then, if they tried to get a clear understanding of things, he blinded them with emotion; if one asked for figures and facts, he confused their minds by gripping speeches about Norway and the good wife!

“There began to be a smattering of Hans Lunde in every man’s life. One met him in the laws, which were enacted or repealed throughout the land, he popped up in the schools, in the courts, at the University, in business, in union-politics — everywhere one could realize by the accumulated mass of words and pity that Hans Lunde had had a finger in the pie, and had made a speech about that wife of his.”

### III

#### POLITICS AND AN AUTHOR

**I**F we try to bring together the thoughts on politics and its effects, which Bojer expresses in these three books, we see by his socially critical sight pictures, the political game as a source of enmities and a means of financial ruin. Small feuds are blown into big ones, new ones arise, whole parishes and hamlets are torn by ruinous animosities, and weak men are trampled heartlessly down. At the same time, politics take up the life and thought of those who should be leaders in the economic and industrial development. So, they neglect their work and have no time to start anything new. Universal stagnation and economic wretchedness are the result.

But beyond and deeper than this social consequence of the political struggle, lie the influences of politics on the individual character — there are, especially, two of these.

First, politics force men to compromise with their conscience. Peter Hegge illustrates this par-

ticularly. He wants to wash his conscience clean by great and pure acts when he first gets into Parliament. But to get there he has to make use of the voters and of the party, and, in both ways, he becomes dependent and forfeits his freedom. To attain a great and good end he has to use small and petty means, and that leaves its mark on him, so that even his abilities become dulled in the process.

Secondly, politics is the chief port that men seek to reach, when they run away from personal responsibility. Of this, Hans Lunde is the most typical expression when he shakes free from every action and grasps at a phrase instead, when he feels himself persecuted instead of responsible, when he smothers his conscience in a debauch of great words, — then is he the representative of a whole group avoiding responsibility. “Those who would meanly lie down in dirt and rags were there ever any self-excuse to find, and no powerful pressure to make them rise again. They drugged their hurts, their hidden shames for the sake of the martyr’s glory, intoxicated themselves, and rejoiced in vague ideas of reform, which left them free while put-



ting all responsibility on some remote fabulous creature, on Society, the State, the Lord, Destiny, or some other far-off thing, so long as they themselves escape."

But, in essence, the two things are the same. Peter Hegge, who compromises with his conscience for the sake of the party and the votes, and Hans Lunde, who flies from responsibility to empty words, resemble one another in one thing: they have not strength of character enough to find their center of gravity in themselves. They are weak men, who have not strength enough to stand alone, and, without dependence on some one else, do what they feel is right. That this is so, we shall see clearly, when we examine "the dark characters" in Bojer's later books, all of whom have been endowed with the same stamp. This appears immediately from the contrasts in even these three books, where we have not yet examined the bright side. In contrast to weakness and decadence, Bojer opposes naturally the positive upbuilding work of people of will power, who take responsibility upon themselves for their own acts and are independent of others' judgment.

In *Et Folketog* the positive side is not very much in the foreground. This appears chiefly in the strong prominence of what is neglected, but, then, also, in the picture of Gunhild's loyal work, in the doctor's arguments, and in the schoolmaster, Trang, who hasn't time for politics because he is studying the ant.

But, already, in *Den Evige Krig*, it is sufficiently clear that the contrast is growing plain. Even in the beginning, when Samuel Brandt determines to go into the party struggle, he becomes a candidate against the will of his family, who are "capable, solid, conservative men, who worked and achieved results." This opposition comes to a point in the great scene with the father, to whose clear sight politics appear as opposed to honest, sterling work. "See, if everybody was a source of pride to his family," says he, "don't you understand that the country's affairs would straighten out themselves? When the estate came into my hands it was loaded with debt. Now it is paid for and I have made great additions to it. The fatherland, you say? Well, I have cleared five hundred acres of land!"

The same opposition appears in Jansen's life. In the period when he had withdrawn from politics his home began to blossom; he is full of the joy of work and one sees that his children, even as small students, understand the blessing of independent creative work.

But it is chiefly Samuel Brandt's brother, Carsten, and his friend the painter, Bratt, who in *Den Evige Krig* stand as representatives of the positive values, and it is clear even as early as in this book, that the "work" Bojer admires is of a particular sort. His workmen, so to say, are all types of "clean youth; possessed of independent ideas which are born in the brain and nourished in the heart" — and who have religious perspective.

Carsten was, at first, a theologian, but that wasn't a success, and then he became an engineer and "used his ideas of eternity in practical work." He invents a boring machine, and his life work becomes railroad construction, and the work becomes his religion. It is really the struggle between light and darkness, a new trade route, a new bank, railroad, road, steamship route, school — they are all practical applica-

tions of religion and brotherly love, and, particularly, does this hold true in respect of a mountainous country like Norway. These are the beliefs also of King Haakon himself. They will fill the land with light, and drive out the evil powers of the trolls.

Bratt is of the same way of thinking. He also believes it, in a way, religious to do creative things. He is not a painter, as he thinks of it, but a priest, and will do honor to God's will, until he finds Him, himself. There is really no difficulty in seeing the family resemblance between this engineer and this painter, and a number of Bojer's later "bright" characters — like the young Peer Holm, of *The Great Hunger*, who believes himself a sort of descendant of Prometheus.

It is true of both *Et Folketog* and *Den Evige Krig* that, viewed as problem novels, they are works of censure and their force is destructive. The positive ideal appears only in glimpses. It has no chance to live an independent life, and in reality, serves only to increase the violence of the attack.

In *Moder Lea* it is quite different. Here the contrast is sharp and clearly outlined, and the accent is laid on the constructive, not on the destructive. This appears even in the fact that it is *Moder Lea*, and not Hans Lunde, who has given the book its name.

Mother Lea and her children are, however, not alone in possessing the author's sympathy; they have to share it with Hans Lunde's wife, Inga. In seeking, however, for an absolute contrast to Hans Lunde, there appear two characters that fulfil these requirements. One is Inga. She had married Hans Lunde because she believed in his "call" — his life's great task to expose his father's murderer, and to see justice done, and because she herself saw it as her mission to sacrifice herself in helping him to do this. Later, when she came to understand him in all his weakness, she despised him to such an extent that she could not bear the shame of having had a child by such a coward. She thought with horror of what a child might become who had such a father. To make reparation for the crime that she considered she had committed in bringing him into the world she killed the child

and took her punishment with face uplifted, as one who had fulfilled a pledge.

The other character that presents itself in stern contrast with Hans Lunde the victim of the destructive force is Mother Lea. Her husband was of the same mold as Hans Lunde, and she could not imagine anything more terrible than that her children should grow up to resemble their father, who is dead when the story opens. This is the difference between her moral problem and that of Inga. The children's inheritance from their father does not seem to be more than what can be overcome by training. Inga would like to bar Hans Lunde out in order to wipe out the blot of him on their child's life, but she can only accomplish this by killing the child. Mother Lea, on the contrary, is so fortunately placed that she can accomplish the same thing by training her children to be a living protest against the entire character of their father.

The farm of Lea's father has been impoverished and all but ruined that her husband may have money to pursue his political career. Upon his death, however, Lea manages to keep the

farm and begins the task of building it up again. Success crowns her efforts because she does not flinch from any trouble, and because she depends on herself alone, desiring to be independent of all other people.

Lea wants, first of all, that her children shall become efficient men, for "she understood that will power is the strongest rampart to character and that, without will, there is no safeguard, no sense of responsibility, no ability to resist. No one could preserve an individual conviction without the ability to form one. The weak lie themselves out of difficulty, the strong-willed have the strength to be upright."

The mother taught them that their proper value was no greater than what they had achieved, and every time something failed of success, there was a sense of stain upon them, until they had brought it to success. At the same time she suggested, in every case, that which had been omitted in the former instance, and opened the way for them to progress. She gave them a goal that demanded of them independent action for its attainment.

They began to work as it were in their play,

but learned easily, from the beginning, to look-out for themselves and never give up half way. First they made their own toys, then their own implements, and then discovered improvements. All that they made was, in the beginning, called forth by the need of the moment; they were necessary things, whose value, in use, was immediately put to proof. Then the nursery was exchanged for the work shop and the smithy; these, in turn, for the factory and the laboratory, and the activities constantly grew in importance.

Thus these young men grew up as ideal workmen. Halvard, the eldest, farmed and, naturally, had helpers. The same principles that Mother Lea had used in bringing up her children, Halvard employed with his workmen. It seemed to him that most men went about with dead minds. They learned in school to wrap themselves in a maze of other people's thoughts, others' beliefs, others' convictions, and underneath all this haze, their own actual personal thought and nature lay like a still-born child. But he believed that "even the weakest man must have had, in his youth, an ideal to be able to be of independent value." And, quite like



John Ruskin, he sought to develop this through creative work. Ruskin's central idea is, practically, that unhappiness in modern society is caused because men are not happy enough in their work, because they must work like slaves instead of creating like free persons. And a quite similar idea will one find in Bojer. "What use either of reform or religion so long as men do not love their work, which they ought to be able to put their soul into. Men must work like slaves to *create* and then the God in them will be awakened, and they will be lifted above themselves." This is the principle Halvard applied in his work, and he and his brothers succeeded in creating joyous, personally-interested workmen out of the youth of the district.

Also, the other brother, the smith Olaf, who became an engineer, the carpenter Erik, who became a sculptor, the scientific Henrik, and the sisters Johanna and Hedvig, who did weaving and embroidering — all are shown as ideal workers, who begin small and end great, and who look with a religious attitude upon their work, and are wholly absorbed in it.

Then, however, comes death into the midst

of the little family group and steals away the youngest, Hedvig. And for a while it seems as though they would be beaten to the earth by that old query: "What use is there in all this, since we must die?" But they are strong enough to rise even above death. The fear of death is only the painful consciousness of life's being over, and the only remedy for this fear is an upstanding spirit. The weak and useless die — that is their penalty, but the worth-while endure and do good for that which comes after.

In *Et Folketog* there are two scenes — which particularly deserve notice because here one sees Bojer's characters in their first rather than their second cinematic form.

Bojer wishes to give as widely comprehensive a picture of the parish as possible, but this demands a picture of the fishing industry. If now such a picture were to appear in a natural manner in a realistic novel, one or other of the people concerned would oversee or take part in a concrete fishery with a definite location.

This is, however, not the method that our author uses. He paints a fishery in general

terms, without definite characters, and that there is no talk of a single concrete fishery, but that the whole is quite abstract, is emphasized by the author's use of general, guarded, or hesitating expression: "*Perhaps* they were then praying for him there." "But then a steamboat might show its red eye from out the fog, or, *perhaps*, it would bear straight down upon the net." "But, if all went well, then *we may be sure*, at dawn, they weighed anchor."

In the realistic novel the practice is, certainly, either that the author tells of a definite situation and person, and tries to present to the reader the illusion that the events have actually occurred, and the people have lived, and that he — the author — knew them. But here we see a complete break, with every device for creating illusion. We hear about indefinite characters, who at an indefinite time, possibly, may have lived, and could have done this and that.

The next stage, where the picture has become more concrete, we get in the picture of the typical poor man. And here the picture is set in the present, and the whole is more definite. It is a single peasant

that is talked of, and we are told that he must sell his horse, and even must pull the seed himself in order to use it, and we see how he can not take any rest when he gets home, but must carry on the struggle, and cut wood and get tinder.

But it is not a particular peasant that is told of — it is *the* peasant. We don't hear what his name is; we don't meet him later, and he has no effect on the development of the action. He is an example; or, if one likes to call him so, an illustration. The author wants to paint the severe struggle of the peasant, and he does so by this method, putting into a single portrait all of the features to serve as a type.

From this to the next stage the distance is not far. We meet a group of characters who, quite certainly, have individual names, and dwelling places and take part in the action, but who, in reality, are only personifications — who have, as their function, to illustrate the author's ideas.

We hear, for example, in *Den Evige Krig* of the position of the church and the army in the radical party. Powerfully and mercilessly are shown how the first natural hostility ends in

reconciliation and united work for mutual benefit. But, as *Den Evige Krig* is not a debate but a novel, the author cannot use really historic and recognized developments; he must clothe them in flesh and blood, and thus are born Pastor Berg and Captain Bull.

Of similar origin are Mrs. Ramm and Editor Kahrs. Instead of saying that the woman question is ludicrous, and motivating the statement with a group of examples, the author gathers all the ludicrousness and pettiness and endows a character with it who can play a rôle in a novel. And instead of, or to put it more exactly, besides portraying the influence of the press on people's lives, a personification, Editor Kahrs, is created, about whom the picture centers.

Also the laborer Jansen serves, despite the fact that he is partially drawn from a model, in a high degree, as an illustration. First he illustrates, by his development, hatred against the social system, the rising up against unfair treatment, and then the power of love and friendliness to turn a fanatic, full of hate, into a happy and useful man. And, finally, he illus-

trates by his fate society's — and especially that portion of society excited by party strife — brutal heartlessness for one who has been rash enough to expose himself because he took empty cant seriously. One cannot help being reminded of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, where the galley slave Jean Valjean, in quite similar manner, on account of the bishop's friendliness, is saved to society, and as Père Madeleine, becomes altogether a suitable priest, until he confesses who he is, and is heartlessly sent back to the galleys.

If one runs through Bojer's characters and attempts to find the connecting link among them, he will see that most of them are made on similar lines. The kernel in them is an idea — be it either moral or psychological — which has caught the author's attention, and which has become living for him in a human character. In so saying we do not, of course, mean to suggest anything belittling of Bojer's power to portray men. It is true of a great many of the most valuable characters in the literature of the world, that they, in similar manner, to a certain degree, can be used as illustrations. What

decides their value is unquestionably the degree to which the author has had the ability *to give his characters life*.

When one compares two characters such as Peter Hegge and his son Anders, it is easy to see the difference. Their origin is assuredly the same; they can both be used as personifications, but Peter Hegge is a living thing, Anders is not. Because Anders is *nothing more than* a personification; he, literally, does not open his mouth without saying, "see who I am." We discover quickly that he is a vain fool, but besides this, we know nothing of him; there is nothing which differentiates him from any other peasant youth who believes himself born to something great, and imagines himself able to become this without doing anything. Peter Hegge, on the contrary, we have an opportunity to see from several points of view. We realize that he is not only a politician, but also a peasant and the father of a family. We see him swayed by various feelings and impulses, and besides the traits that render him typical, we learn to know others that are his alone, and that distinguish him from other peasant politicians, whose destinies per-

haps are similar; and, at the same time that we see mistakes that he makes in politics, on the farm, and in his home, we realize also the difficulties that beset him, and that rise higher and higher till they overwhelm him.

This is the one method by which an author can give a character life — by making him many-sided and composite, and by bringing out his connection and interaction with his environment.

This same thing can be made clear in another way. Why Berg really is plainly more living than Kahrs, is not only and not first and foremost, because he is a little more individualized, but it is, especially, because the author — and through him, the reader also — feels more strongly for him. His struggle and his wavering is not so strongly individual, but the portrayal, in its stead, has strength enough to grip us, so that the struggle and wavering emotional attitude become living for us. Somewhat similarly this is true, at times, of Jansen — especially after the great catastrophe. Bojer is too great a writer to let such moving material, with the personal indignation lying back of it, remain wholly and constantly dead under his hand. Despite the



finger pointing, there are moments when one is absolutely carried away.

The difference between Kahrs and Karsten Brandt is even more characteristic. Karsten is almost as one-sidedly treated as the editor. We know nothing much more of him than that he is an engineer who believes religiously in his cultural mission. The portrait is, in nowise, individual, but the author has, to that degree, lived through his eyes and, to that degree, felt with his feelings and impulses that he makes him live, regardless of anything in the book.

One of the most conspicuous results of Bojer's disposition towards this personifying is that dimensions are easily magnified. Just because Kahrs is not a man, as has been remarked, but a constructed personification of an idea, both his abilities and his importance are overdrawn. No real editor would be able to be, to such a degree, ubiquitous as he is, and however great the power of the press, yet such an attack of nightmare in a whole parish as this, which is here told of, seems, certainly in the same way, impossible in reality. The contrast between the three periods in Pastor Berg's life — before the

radicals come into power, during the struggle, and after the reconciliation — is also too glaring to be worthy of belief. And, without wanting to say anything good about feminine gossip, one must certainly admit that Mrs. Ramm is several degrees worse than real life is likely to produce.

Very strongly marked is this overdrawing in *Moder Lea*. Both she and, particularly, her sons surpass, by far, the limits of ordinary humanity. That educator of man, that engineer and artist and man of science — they are not men but heroes. And the portrayal of their development, from the time when they play their first games till their work spreads out in its influence over the whole world, is not a novel but a myth. Their energy, the extent of their ability, their success, the method by which they overcome nature and the elements, their music, their beauty — all alike are on a much higher plane than that of the average man. It is impossible to think of them as living beings in a valley amidst the Norwegian mountains; they have only one real home place — in the author's imagination.

Now there is obviously none that would want to forbid an author writing myths, or fairy tales, or stories of Utopias, but when this is introduced into a realistic novel, the framework is shattered, and there is an element of uncertainty and lack of form that impair the value of the book.

*Et Folketog* is the one of the three books in which this is least true. It is, by far, the most homogeneous, and constructed with the surest touch, even though, perhaps in depth, it must stand below both the others. It is uniform and single in its plan, and, with the exception of the unhappy ending, the author has, nowhere, set himself too great a task for his ability. At the heart of the book stands Peter Hegge, and, about him, are grouped the other people, so to speak, in circles which become less individualized and more typical the nearer they reach the periphery, until they become merely part of the background, like the typical poor man and the abstract fishing group already mentioned. In fact, the book's chief theme is, at least, nearly as much the parish as it is Peter Hegge. It is, first and foremost, the portrayal of a *milieu*, and for this purpose, it is well for the people seldom to

be presented separately, but chiefly when engaged in joint work, or when definite occasions bring them together. The book, certainly, has a purpose, but one can see, at the same time, that the author has an evident pleasure in the picture for its own sake, and this pleasure shows itself, not least of all, in the pictures of the typical events and scenes that take up the greater part of the book. The fishermen's home-coming, the cutting of the hay, going to church, summer fairs, Christmas festivities, and, naturally, the political events, electoral meetings and voting — all these are painted quietly and in detail, without great gestures, but graphically and vividly, so that the picture of the parish and its life grows into a whole, and stand forth clearly and vividly.

In *Den Evige Krig* the descriptions are much less equally balanced. The number of people and their different destinies are assuredly and adroitly knitted together, but they become divergent to a great degree. The inhabitants of Lindergard are, nearly all, very livingly portrayed, and that part of the book which is concerned with them, is a realistic romance, written in a strongly lyrical spirit. Editor Kahrs and his

circle are, however, more or less lifeless personifications, and the parts of the book in which they dominate are, practically, social-criticism essays in novel form. It cannot be denied that these parts are written with great power, and despite the more abstract and didactic flavor, are read with interest. But the different constituent parts of the book do not cohere, so that the work lacks homogeneity. In still greater degree is this same thing true of *Moder Lea*. The two contrasted parts are here, over plainly, ungermane. Lea and her sons are portrayed as ideal figures, with great lives and in mighty dimensions, but their opposite, Hans Lunde, is a little common man who is painted with great sedulousness and most minute psychological analysis. That such different sorts of beings are brought together into the same valley and united by the action of the novel is disintegrating in its effect on the book. One has the impulse to try to disentangle it into its separate strands, and this can quite easily be done. There would then be a fantasy or myth, or whatever one really wants to call it, about Lea and her sons, that could be read with profit because of the value of the

idea and the power of the descriptions, and there would be a psychological novel about Hans Lunde and his wife that would take its place as Bojer's most distinguished work before *Troens Magt* (The Power of a Lie).

## IV

### BOJER'S CHARACTERS

WHEN an author wishes to portray a character, he must, necessarily, make a distinction between the essential and the unessential. He cannot follow his hero, in every movement, day by day, from hour to hour, and portray every least thing. He has to foreshorten.

Such a foreshortening can, however, be accomplished in two ways.

It can be brought about by the whole picture being, so to speak, attenuated, all details left out, only the big headlines left — a narrative of the hero's fate in a few strokes.

But it can be brought about by the description being concentrated upon the prominent and characteristic episodes. The intervening periods are passed over, but to make up for this, the important situations and events get a certain fullness of treatment. Instead of listening to a

condensed report, we get an opportunity to see and hear for ourselves.

In every modern novel both sorts of foreshortening are employed, as the author usually describes a number of episodes, and reports what happens between them. But the episode nearly always stands in the foreground as the most living and moving part of the picture.

Such an episode can, obviously, have its chief interest and value in itself, but underneath, have also its value in connection with the whole; it can push the action a step forward; it can contribute to the portrayal of the hero's development, or give him opportunity to show a new side of his character. But the episode can also be a symbol, with deeper meaning and wider perspective than the other, containing the essence of a whole character or a whole development. And just this use of such symbolic episodes is one of the chief distinctions of Bojer's style.

We saw that when Bojer wanted to paint a poor peasant it came to him naturally to do this by the method of uniting a number of portraits into a single type, and when he wanted to treat the newspaper or the woman question, he con-



centrated, in a similar way, all into a single picture, a personification.

He does not, however, stop here, but carries the concentration farther, as he seeks to bring out the character description in markedly plastic situations with symbolic perspective. As the press is typified in Kahrs, so is Kahrs expressed in the scene where he stands at the secret ballot, and with his searching glance, forces those hesitating to vote as he wishes. All his power over the town is summed up in this silent picture. We find similar instances again and again: most of the characters are shown once, or more than once, in a situation which is, as it were, a symbol of their inner self or their destiny, where we hear their ground tones ring out clear and full.

When *Et Folketog* ends with Peter Hegge and the others, while they are singing national songs, blindly driving towards the rapids, it is obviously something more than an adventitious ending; it is an attempt, in a single scene, as in a burning point, to gather together the whole meaning of the book. But, except in this case, it is especially in the two other books that this sort of symbol sets its mark on the narrative.

We saw that Samuel Brandt began as a sincere idealist, but his independence and strength of will were too weak to protect him from party control; he is overpowered, is thrown out of his course, and ends by deceiving himself and others. The crucial scene, symbolic of this whole development, is his first public appearance as speaker, where he begins by saying what he has at heart, but, literally, is carried away by the crowd in front of him, and is worked up into saying what they desire and are accustomed to hearing, until, when it is all over, he is seized with self scorn and despair. "He had a feeling as if he had lived through a lifetime up there in the speaker's chair." And he had, in fact — through his own.

For Lea's affairs we have particularly two such scenes. One is the scene where she is at the beginning of her work, and, one day, goes out to look at the new fields, her energy cleared. "Slowly, and as if praying, she walked; it was certainly delightful; a new joy began to fill her breast; it was as though the earth communicated itself to her, and mounted into her body with a marvellously intoxicating force. What was it that was happening? She was sowing for

her own future, in confidence in the ground, sowing the seeds of destiny for herself and for her children, and every time she scattered fresh handfuls of corn, it was like a new prayer that happiness might come of the act. She became, even while she walked there sowing her seed, transported by a stronger and stronger rapture, and like a madonna, she walked back and forth now, back and forth, strewing the seed, giving it to the virgin earth's body, which for the first time was to be blessed with fruitfulness."

When she finishes, she sits down on a stone, and then is given us a plastic group of the same sort as Zola, particularly in his later books, liked to portray: "As if feeling the need to be very strong she gathered her children around her like a hen with her chickens. And these young workers suddenly broke out into joyous shouts at her caress, clung to her arm, climbed into her lap, leaned on her breast, clambered on her back, and hung about her neck, till they at last seemed one in body, one in soul, one in love, breaking forth in joy and caresses and the love word of all words, 'mother! mother!'"

The other scene is the one, where Lea, at the

end of her life, on her eightieth birthday, like the diamond-wedding pair in Zola's *Fertility* sits looking out over her flock of blooming children and grandchildren, and over the whole parish whose blessing she has been, and from which her blessing now streams out farther over the earth.

"Her life was begun like a kernel of grain, in the children it became an ear — from which had come an acre. Was she not immortal?"

Between these scenes — one might almost say tableaux — lies Lea's life, but, in them, is contained her destiny; her joyous strength, and her work's and her education's fruitful success. That Bojer himself found the symbol, in the last scene, too massive is seen in the Swedish translation, where the last chapter, with the description of the birthday, is omitted.

The most living and strongly impressive of all these situations with symbolic meaning is probably old Brandt's death in *Den Evige Krig* (The Eternal Strife), when he lay dying, and the three sons sat in the next room waiting. They seem, in that moment, like representatives for each of the powers of the mind, but at the

same time, like living men, torn by mutual hostility and harrowed by the strain because they wait for the arrangements their father would make at his death. Then, suddenly, the door of the sick room opened, and the dying father, who for a year and a day had not been able to walk, on account of his lameness, stood there in his white night robe. The three brothers turned ghastly white and were stricken dumb, because they felt that he came like a judge of their eternal strife. But the father walked firm and upright across the floor, wrote his name on Carsten's document, and held it out to him. He had given his life's all, his blessing to practical work, and at the same time, pronounced sentence of death over the two others. Then his strength gave out, he staggered, and Carsten, who got the blessing, carried his dead father in his arms into the bed.

There is an extraordinary power in the whole scene; every word, every gesture works in close harmony. More strongly, or more seizingly than in this picture, the author could not give his book's underlying thought.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPTIMISM

*Vort Rige* (Our Kingdom) is called in the French translation, *Sous le Ciel Vide* (Beneath the Empty Sky), and Bojer's following novel is called *Liv* (Life). In the contrast evident in these two titles is expressed also the contrast between the mood of Bojer's earlier books and those which from now on became the rule. With the exception of Carsten and Bratt in *Den Evige Krig*, Bojer's brighter characters have, up to this time, only been found in the myth about Lea and her gigantic sons and in the fairy tales in *Hvide Fugle*. But, in *Liv*, they enter into the realistic novel as modern, living men.

There are, first and foremost, the painter Tangen and his brother the architect. Like Peer Holm in *Den Store Hunger* they are illegitimate children brought up by poor foster parents in the country, and it is by their own efforts that they have made a success of themselves. The painter with his four and twenty years is already

well upon the road to world fame, but his brother is still too young to have been able yet to work out his mighty ideas. But the point in common between them is the overflowing joy in life, which bubbles out like the rush of sparkling water about them. The architect is only slightly individualized, he is merely the young, richly talented youth, who in the flush of first love and a fixed belief in his own abilities, sees life as nothing but sunshine, and brushes away all difficulties as if it were part of a game. But the painter is made very living, and is one of Bojer's finest characters, an advance sketch for Sigurd Braa. His life hunger is insatiable, yet no effect of low greed is given. He is a painter and sculptor, sportsman and social lion, naturalist and lady's-man, but everything that he does and thinks is marked by the same unlimited love of life and ability to enjoy it to the full. He is reckless and extravagant. Once, when he had sold a picture for twenty thousand and already used a good deal of the money, the purchaser died, and the transaction was not ratified. But Tangen managed a loan and gave a riotous feast "to his ruined dream." "Because, one must make

fate respect him. If it shows signs of attacking, give it a kick, and say, 'Three blows from life, my friend. Of us two, I intend to be master!' "

And when, because of his recklessness, he gets into trouble and must sell his beautiful home at auction, and live poorly in the country, he finds an advantage in this:

"It is peerless to live in the country," he says. "One gets so honorable. No flirtations. No snobbishness. Tobacco in pipe and herring on the table. And then, besides, this period of purgatory will have its effect on my art. I was pretty well on the way to becoming superficial and false in my work, but now I shall go and rub the sand out of my eyes and attempt to be original again."

"And your wife?" asks the friend.

"An idyll, my friend. Love and honeymoon business between us from morning till night."

To none of the book's characters does the title more fittingly apply than to the painter. He has a profound union with life which never is disturbed or destroyed, because his joy is absolute, his happiness is life itself and is independent of what his fate may be.



But beside him and his brother there is a whole group of other bright characters — all the circle which surrounds him, and the brilliantly drawn old General Bang, and his son Reidar, who ran away from military school and set out on his own hook to the Klondike, and who now can soar upon skis all day long, dance the whole evening and then at night, when the others sleep, go to the station to send a telegram, taking a chance in a speculation that is a matter of hundreds of thousands.

There is an unruly gaiety in the whole circle. "Haven't you noticed that for some time a sort of rejuvenation is bursting forth in Norway?" says the painter. "This new generation is not dulled by politics or literary hospital air — no. One dresses prettily, is athletic, dances, and takes care of his body. Joy in living makes things happen. Wait, and you'll see."

And this abundant life is contagious. Even Dr. Holth, through love of Astrid, acquires a new youth and new love of life, though he already was well on the way to be dried up by burdens and worry over household cares. His dingy surroundings are freshened up and the whole home

acquires the new imprint, and when it is over, he has a desire for tenderness and peace which brings him closer to his wife than he has been for years. Besides this, he has, like the five old monks in *Paa Minderness Ö*, "a wonderful memory in his heart, that can never die."

Brightness and joy in living are, however, not in absolute control in *Liv*. The contrast to General Bang's brilliant circle is Captain Riis, who sits in his poverty, wrapped in nothing but bitterness and desire for revenge. His life has been nothing but a series of disappointments; his career was ruined, his wife played him false, and now that he is old, his life is merely a great envy and enmity towards his happy rival in life, General Bang.

He represents the dark side — all that we recognize from Bojer's earlier books. Since he himself is bitter and lets suffering master him, the suffering spreads about him, and the one on whose head it is wreaked is his pretty, life-hungry, young daughter, Astrid.

She has come to be friends with the daughter of General Bang and goes to his home without daring to tell her father that she does so, and

even gets eventually to love the son, Reidar. But she dares not give herself up fully to the joyousness of the Bang's circle; she feels always like a traitor to her father. He is fretful and bitter, and very demanding, but this is, of course, only because life has been very evil to him, and each time she braces herself to open revolt in order to get a chance to be young and live her own life, she draws back from the opportunity and fears to deliver the death blow to so hard pressed a man.

So the young Astrid lives a divided and distressed life. The small joys she manages to get she must steal and pay dearly for in her conscience because they necessitate lying to her father, so, finally, the catastrophe happens. She dares not yield to her feeling for Reidar Bang, but her passion is awakened, and when Dr. Holth pays earnest court to her, she lets herself be carried away, puts him in Reidar's place in her thoughts, and so dreaming that he is her real lover she gives herself one beautiful summer night on the fjord to the doctor. What use is it that she wakes to reality dismayed, what use is it that she breaks with her father at last and is

married to Reidar. It is too late; the yielding to Dr. Holth has had consequences, and shortly after her wedding, she sails out on the fjord one stormy day and does not return.

That a fresh young girl should give herself to a man whom she does not really love but whom she pretends is another is certainly, to say the least, improbable. To be sure the power of imagination is great, and in the case of Knut Norby, Bojer succeeded in giving the delusion credibility, but here he does not carry the reader with him.

One wonders, perhaps, also, what purpose this improbability serves, for it is not simply treated as an interesting psychological case, yet it certainly was not introduced purely for its own sake. But, in the plan of the novel, it serves as an accusation against Captain Riis. To be sure, he has had a sad life, and the author has put so much effort into motivating his bitterness, that one can almost feel it justified. But one isn't justified in bitterness for anything in the world. When Captain Riis permits his hate and his animosity to limit Astrid's lot, and demands that she shall sacrifice her youth and her right to

happiness, then he is a typical "dark character" of Bojer's, and here, as in the other books, unhappiness must result. Bojer's optimism is not absolute. In *Liv* we see the power of joy in living to make life happy, but evil constantly breeds evil, and the book is constructed to show just this contrast. And Astrid's use in the plan of the book is just to show that joy in life is not absolute in its power; her lot is to be sacrificed and thus to illustrate what fateful consequences Captain Riis' hate and enmities have, so that he is shown in frightful contrast to the bright characters in the Bang circle.

Now one can well imagine that the same thing could have been accomplished if Astrid only had been of the sort to break with her father, when he, in that way, persisted in standing between her happiness and Reidar's. But really it could not. For such as Reidar is painted, he is not the man who would let himself be prevented for any length of time from conquering his loved one. If she did not have the courage to break with her father, he would manage somehow so that at last it really should happen anyway. If the results of the "powers of darkness" in Captain Riis show

themselves in Astrid's being precipitated into misfortune, then it must specially be arranged that Reidar has time to interfere. This is doubtless the explanation of her so improbable affair with Dr. Holth.

The strife between the powers of light and darkness in *Liv* is not simply that of being opposites. It is more complicated and more tragic. Captain Riis' bitterness is considerably to blame in Astrid's unhappy fate. But why did Captain Riis become bitter? "Happiness has its shadow," is said somewhere in the book, and this is so. All the impulsive careless joy of living in the Bang's circle has its dark side. There was, to begin with, General Bang, who was the guilty cause of Captain Riis' unhappiness — it was he that was put over him, and he that betrayed the Captain's wife and spoiled his life, not from evilness, oh, no, only in the overflowing ardor of his vitality, which is his strength.

And, in the same way, when Dr. Holth renews the youth of his spirit in his love affair — that also has its tragic consequences: his happiness is Astrid's undoing.

No, optimism is not absolute. The joyous un-

folding of life is beautiful for the one who blossoms out but not for the others.

*Liv* has an unusual number of pretty descriptions, both of nature and of the exhilaration from sports, from the early part of the book to Astrid's still gliding out into death at the end. But it does not, as a whole, reach the artistic level with the just previously written novels. This is not merely because of the artificiality and improbability in Astrid's fate, but, to a much greater degree, depends on the dissimilarity between theme and mood. As the novel is constructed, Astrid Riis is undoubtedly the heroine, and her unhappiness and tragic death are, strictly speaking, its theme. But the book's tone and mood are altogether other than tragic. *Liv* was written when Bojer, after many years of residence abroad, came home to Norway again, and it is first and foremost an interest in Norwegian nature and youthful joy in life that stamps it. Skiing and dancing, tennis, the bright nights, St. Hansfest, hunting and the many other varied joys of living are described with such a glamor that one takes the tragic ending quite good-humoredly after all.

Bojer's next three works, the allegory *Fangen Som Sang* (The Prisoner Who Sang), (1913), the *Sigurd Braa* (1916) and the novel *Den Store Hunger* (1916) have all a hero who, like the painter Tangen in *Liv*, has come of poor beginnings, but, driven by their "hunger for life" get to the point where they can only satisfy it by ever greater methods.

When Sigurd Braa, in the first act, comes home from a ride, he tells about all the things he has imagined while he was out. The best thing is how many different people one is, he thinks. "If you see a mound, you say to yourself: 'I am Napoleon, and that is Austerlitz. Go free.' And if you pass a church, you rise in your stirrups and say: 'I am Knight Roland and must away to slay the heathen at Roncevaux.' And finally, you meet, of course, a pretty girl, and then . . . then, you are a troubadour who must away and carry off the princess from a tower. When you get home you have lived the life of every sort of man and mixed with half of the universe."

On this theme *Fangen Som Sang* is written. Andreas Berget grows up with an insatiable



thirst for life, for experiences — which he steadily slakes recklessly. He flings a window down from a loft to see the terror it will cause, he shrieks out "Devil fly away with me" in the middle of a funeral in order to enjoy the result. He brings life into the whole country-side through summoning the whole world to a conciliation commission for the most amazing things. But his longing for experience takes another turn also. He puts himself into other people's personalities as he reads, and lives their lives in fancy, yes, soon begins to create for himself various rôles: he pretends to be a beggar and fools the priest; he appears as a rich land owner and he fools even the old, crafty merchant in the town. One time he was an actor but he didn't care for this rôle because both he and others knew it was pretense. Then he began to act his rôles in earnest in his own life. He couldn't see how people could be contented to be the same person year in and year out. Fancy, during a whole year, only living one person's experience! No — his life should be other than this. Each time he met a man that interested him, he would ask himself: could you act his part? Could

you live his life? Could you share in his experiences?

Thus he leads a roving existence being constantly a new person. Now he is a Methodist preacher and holds a revival, now he is a German gynecologist who makes a sensation at a Cure. And he isn't contented merely to change externals; he lived himself into the character — he "played" it. When he has to be a Norwegian-born engineer from Alaska, then he studies the part, thinks over everything that could happen to him, and his reading and thinking come to seem like recollections, until he finally feels that he *is* the person he is enacting. "I don't content myself with being shut up in a single life experience," he says, "I hunger for new, always and ever new ones. I had a voice in me which cried out for new and ever new human forms; this was to me study, development, the impulse of eternity — life." He creates personalities like a playwright, or a poet, but instead of shutting them up in a book, or a scene, he gives them life, and lets them take the air among men.

But, finally, he meets his fate; he comes to

love a woman, and she loves him. But who is it she loves? Who is he? At the moment a farmer from Brazil, but heretofore? — and next year? His actual personality has been destroyed meantime; he has divided himself up among a group of characters who each get believed in but who are all imposters. Can he tie a woman to this sort of a man?

So the farmer is drowned a week before the wedding and Andreas pops up in a new character. But now it comes to pass that his ability grows less; he makes mistakes, and the police, who have a long reckoning against him for many goings on, get hold of him.

But, in prison, his imagination goes yet further — entirely beyond bounds. In ten thousand years there will come a ruler over the whole of our planet. Can you take on his character? In a hundred thousand years there will come one who shall reign over the whole universe. What will he be like? In the neighboring cells they heard a happy prisoner walking up and down the floor of his cell, singing.

*The Prisoner who Sang* is half a story, half a fairy tale. A great mass of details are living and

realistic, but all proportions are magnified, with a regal disregard for probability. Most men know certainly both the impulse to say "Devil fly away with me" in the midst of some ceremonial and to live themselves into other characters and fates than their own. But one keeps decently still, nevertheless, and the experiences occur only in imagination. But Andreas actually lived the parts. He had both the unscrupulousness and the ability to transform himself to an absolute degree. The whole description is to be interpreted as an experiment. The premises are the impulse for constantly changing experiences, the problem to point the satisfaction of this longing — without limit — and the result is the complete annihilation of personality. The influence of the will and of the desire on the actions has, to be sure, already been treated of in the earlier books — here it is the same influence only now become absolute. What Andreas wishes, he gets; what he wants to be, he becomes. The opportunity for this possibility does not belong to reality but to the land of fairy.

*Fangen Som Sang* is as an experiment very interesting; the beginning is fresh and amusing,

but, later, the details do not have sufficient value to compensate for the fact that one has, long before, grown clear as to the meaning, and could practically complete it just as well himself.

In Sigurd Braa's character we meet the same appetite for life and what it has to offer. But while *Fangen Som Sang* was a fairy tale and a study of a pathological case, Sigurd Braa is a strongly personified expression of a glorification of the modern renaissance character.

In the two first acts he is painted as the ideal superman who enjoys life as if he were ten men and works like twenty, and for whom everything that he is connected with goes gloriously. He loves pomp and magnificence, riding and outdoor sports, dancing and champagne, and feasting in the long, bright nights. He must have a part in everything, enjoys everything boisterously yet intensely, and cannot be satisfied. He loves his wife deeply and honorably, but love gives him "the taste for more" and he enjoys to the full the pleasure which other women can provide him with.

At the same time he is the genial worker, in-

ventor, and director to the full, but the aim of all this work is neither money nor renown; he dreams of what he, rather philosophically, calls "a relation between the degree to which one creates and the gaiety of one's thoughts, the pride in one's own character." He wants to have "more power over his abilities, more bright-arched heaven above him," and, at the same time he wants others to share with him the same aims, to be "priests of freedom to men's thoughts, to create happiness and growth and joy in life for the thousands."

Such is Sigurd Braa, "King Braa" as people call him. But things go with him as with the Knight in the poem, who rode over the country in a splendid purple cap — and made all the dogs howl. King Braa had many enemies, and when the time was ripe, they hurled themselves upon him, led by his arch enemy, Roll. He is removed from his position, his friends let themselves be bought or are frightened, the press besmirches him, and he is even accused of embezzling. This is the test of his character, — now he must show his value as a man, show whether he can face suffering as well as good days.

The conflict reaches a climax — rather well planned — in the matter of the forgery. Sigurd Braa has actually taken 100,000 kronen from the company's money — but he has used them as a fund for the workers. If he explains the whole matter he will undoubtedly be freed by the jury, but the workers must be without their fund again. If he keeps still, he must go to prison, but the fund will be saved. The fund has become the symbol of all in his efforts that has ideal value. Is he man enough to sacrifice himself in order to save the cause?

Sigurd Braa wavers. Shall Roll also have the triumph of seeing him sentenced as a criminal? But then Eli, his wife, comes to his help.

"Those who have a religion," says she, "they are able to stand up under even greater adversity. But we who do not believe in a faraway God in the clouds, we must try to do for ourselves that which the others look for from him." And she begins to recall all the beautiful experiences life has brought them. "If these things cannot give us some small support in evil days, then there is no great use in all of that.

"As for me, Sigurd, the wonderful moments we

have lived through are like a sort of sacred revelation. And here we sit, as rich as this, you and I, and yet you call us poor. Yet you will let the world bring us low! Eh? Suppose we fill our hearts full of our most beautiful memories, you and I, and show ourselves richer than anyone, just when the world believes we are beaten. If we fling a really valuable gift to the mob, not for mankind's sake, but as a little monument to our happiness, you and I — just so that our youth will not die, our love shall not die, just so that beauty shall not perish in this earth, eh? Thus we shall have a little something to warm ourselves by when we are far apart sometime."

"I understand," says Braa. "You — you want me — to — to go to prison!"

And Eli smiled. "If you have courage enough for that now, when the world believes you are broken, then it seems to me it will be the finest thing you could do, Sigurd, with your insatiable hunger, your love of life, your genius. Thus high have your abilities led you. . . ."

And Sigurd Braa goes to prison. And when he comes out he feels so fine because of his



“saved-up summer feeling” that he has courage to go to Roll and not only forgive him but help him out of a desperate situation. It is very impressive in the last act, these two set face to face. Roll, who has amassed wealth and influence, who forced Braa from his position in order to seize it for himself, but who has been pining with horror and self-scorn and has lost all ability to be glad of what he has accomplished, and Braa, who has nothing but his inward wealth, rejoicing in his memories and believing in his own character. They are both aware that it is Braa who is the richer of the two, — yes, so rich, that he has courage to divide his surplus vitality with the other and try “to make a great man out of him.”

But that Sigurd Braa is capable of such lengths is due to Eli.

Eli is the opposite of Theodora in the play of 1902. The latter was willing to sacrifice her emotional life so as not to be bound by anything or dependent in any way. But Eli — who might have become an artist — felt that it was “more worth while to throw one’s self, and one’s talents, the whole world to the wind for one’s

husband." And in her love for him, she found the happiness that cast its halo over her character.

The play begins with her finding out that she has only half a year to live. But this does not crush her. On the contrary. She compares herself to a sick crane she had seen, decked with a plume of blood-red and violet feathers. As sickness made it "break out into a mighty flame of life," so she also will bloom till the end.

Each beauty she chanced on, every happiness that came to her, filled her with an almost unearthly joy — "fancy my having the chance to enjoy this, too!" is her constant refrain. But she does not merely enjoy herself; she tries in these last days also with redoubled effort to create happiness, she occupies herself with the poor, she drills the workingmen's chorus in "the hymn to life," and, first and foremost, she helps Sigurd Braa — who must know nothing of her sickness — to bear the ill-fortune which comes upon him.

"Where do you get your supernatural courage from?" asked the doctor of her. "Why, you see," she answers, "I have had such a wonderfully

fine time in my life, and I've seen and experienced so much beauty. And so I must at least try to pay it back somehow."

And this very idea she inculcates in Sigurd Braa, so that he in the consciousness of his rich experience, feels himself equal to the greatest sacrifice. There is a sublime beauty over the scene where Eli and Sigurd Braa talk of their happiness, and where he decides to go to prison, and she — knowing she will never see him again — still is able to rejoice fully at "sending him away to a glorious deed."

And, even when Eli dies while Sigurd Braa is in prison, she still lives in his soul. "Do you believe that the woman whom a man loves in any real way can ever die?" he asks. And it is the memory of her that fills him constantly with joy and strength. Listen to what he says, himself:

"I could howl and wail with sorrow now. But her memory belongs where people smile. I could give up and be done with it all. But she — she wants to live. And it seems to me that every act that changes some ugly thing to beauty, is a sort of present of life to her. That brings her

back among us. . . . You see me smiling . . . that is because I feel she would have it so. Perhaps I can implant her ideas also in other men. Or in inventions which lead men's spirits to more brightness. We can, in many ways, make those we love immortal."

Bojer's earlier productions contain certainly many attractive and fine women characters. Often it is they who, innocent and yet uncomplaining, bear the consequences of men's fights and men's hardness. Kristine Hegge in *Et Folketog*, who is sacrificed by her father; Sara Brandt in *Den Evige Krig*, who sacrifices herself for her brother; Astrid Riis in *Liv*, who is driven to her unhappy end because of her father's bitter spirit of hate. Often it is they who stand up beside their men and give them belief and joy in their work, and create beauty in their soul. Always they are drawn with gentle soft touches, often affectionately, with an appreciation and admiration that are rare in modern literature. *Kjaerlighetens Oine* and *Hvide Fugle* are even like a rapturous hymn to the praise of young girls.

But none of Bojer's other characters reach up

to the level of Eli Braa, that ideal wife, whose spirit is so rich in happiness that she can smile at fate and bear all burdens gaily for her husband's sake, and whoever has been in Bojer's home can readily understand that he has not drawn this character entirely from imagination.

Norwegian literature has few pictures of married life which, in beauty, can measure up to this. The sympathetic understanding between man and wife, the mutual joy and the mutual help approach absolute harmony and consummate richness.

Sigurd Braa's character is considerably less admirable than Eli's. This is clear particularly in the matter of his hunger for life, as this is portrayed in the first two acts. They are both too ponderous and too philosophic, by the way, and he talks too much in them. It is probably the dramatic form that here impedes Bojer. One sees this, for example, in comparing Braa with Tangen in *Liv*. Tangen also loves his wife and yet he is attracted and infatuated every time he comes across a young and pretty woman. But the novel form, where all the reasons for moods can be brought out, and where the author, by the

tone of his style itself, can spread a charm over that which he is describing manages to give the whole the effect of lightness and "innocence" which he intends. But, in the play, there is something less airy, and it doesn't manage to give the effect of mere trifling.

Sigurd Braa is much better in the third act in the scene with Eli; and in the last act, where he comes face to face with Roll, his replies have a quietness and an inward strength which give them a highly subjective flavor; one feels to how great a degree the author himself stands behind and within what he says. *Fangen Som Sang* was, as were many of Bojer's works, received with very ungracious antagonism by the leading Norwegian critics (The same is true of *Sigurd Braa*, also. One reviewer wrote, for example, that it couldn't be worse, as it set a premium on affectation), and one can hardly make a mistake if one in Sigurd Braa's attitude towards his enemies sees a manifestation of the author's triumph over a not unnatural bitterness.

Technically speaking *Sigurd Braa* is not a very distinguished piece of work. Bojer's forte is conclusively the novel rather than the drama,

and in a high degree. But, even among his plays, *Sigurd Braa* must be ranked below *Brutus* for plastic ability in situations and brilliant psychology, and below *Kjaerlighetens Oine*, with its fairy tale tone and its clear though rather markedly apparent structure. In the first two acts of *Sigurd Braa* there is no real dramatic development, and, particularly, the second act is diffuse and static. The third act, on the contrary, (the great scene between Eli and Braa) is remarkable, and the meeting between Braa and Roll in the last act is excellent, but the final tableau where the workmen, at Sigurd Braa's instigation, tender Roll an ovation and where Braa's little daughter brings him flowers will hardly bear daylight. One of the minor characters, the wild man of the forest, who, unfortunately, has a considerable part throughout the play, is exceedingly unsuccessful and has a most irritating effect.

The chief distinction of *Sigurd Braa* is the beauty of the ideas and the lyrical power with which they are expressed, particularly in Eli's speeches. The pursuit of joy and trust in the power of happy memories to create a dwelling

place for the spirit, which no suffering can tear one from, appeared previously in *Hvide Fugle*. But here it is removed from fairyland and introduced into real modern life without destroying anything of its glamor. And more stress is laid upon the strength which streams forth from an inner joy. "If one has breathed more fragrance and light than most people, then one is in duty bound also to do a little better than they," says Sigurd Braa. And indeed one has the strength to. So one can outwit fate by smiling, when one would otherwise be utterly crushed. So one can triumph over his enemies, not by obstinately fighting for one's rights, but by lavishly giving them of one's soul's wealth.

The religious tone that is so apparent in *Sigurd Braa* is more rather than less distinct in the following works of Bojer. But Erik Evje in *Vort Rige* and Reidar Bang in *Liv* talk of the religious poverty of the day, and nearly all those of his characters who have any of the light of idealism upon them are marked by the desire to get religious perspective for their life. Carsten Brandt in *Den Evige Krig* was not merely ab-



sorbed in his work, but it was to him a religion. It was this same attitude that Bratt took towards his art, and Samuel Brandt towards democracy. And Lea's sons and the two Tangen brothers in *Liv* want to approach the universal, the religious, in what they create; yes, even mathematics becomes, for Theodora, a divinity which she reverences.

This religious striving is the keynote in *Den Store Hunger*. It is this quality that fills and stamps Peer Holm's character, and it is in the portrayal of this, that Bojer has attained his greatest height as author.

Peer Holm is, like the brothers Tangen in *Liv*, an illegitimate child, who is brought up by foster parents in the country, and like them he has the unquenchable spark that leads him onward and ever upward.

The religious yearning is evident in him from his earliest youth, but, as is natural with a child, this does not find expression in faith but in moods. Sister Louise is playing once in a hospital room where he lies sick, "The Great White Host" on her violin, and he feels himself buoyed up by the tones, he is enveloped by the "hymn-

feeling, so that all difficulties are cleared away — so that one is borne aloft by an indescribable ecstasy, which expands one's soul, till one embraces all infinity."

The God of the Bible, whom he had learned to believe in when he was a child, he soon revolted against. Louise dies and Peer feels it as an unreasonable injustice. Heaven is closed, fate is blind, and mankind left to its own resources. But just because of this men must "rebel against tyranny on heaven's part." And Peer feels himself to be a sort of descendant of Prometheus. He wants to join in lifting the ladder by which men can climb upwards — higher and higher, steadily towards more clearness and spirituality and mastery of nature. For every victory which the spirit of man wins over nature wrenches something of their omnipotence from the hands of the gods."

Then Peer Holm becomes engineer and travels to Egypt as missionary of culture and of the future. But within his soul still rises a doubt whether this is yet the way to reach the infinite. "Could men by studying attain one evening to being able to stretch a finger upward and cause

the stars themselves to sing?" Could science lead men on to the universal? To the very feeling of the psalmist?

After several years of hard, heavy work in damming the Nile, and at desert railway construction, he came home, practically through with all dreams of making men able to steal more and more fire from Olympus. "I believe that fire and steel will soon brutalize men," said he. "Machines kill more and more of that which we call the god-like in us."

"For mankind to progress fast — you call that nothing?" asks his old schoolmate, Langberg.

"But, good heavens, how can men do that when they rush so?"

"For the regulation of the Nile to double the grain production of Egypt, and provide the necessities of life for millions of men — that's nothing?"

"My dear fellow, you think we have too few idiots here on this earth? Too little wailing and crying out for justice, and complaining, and discontent? You really think we should double the amount of all this?"

But how about the culture of Europe that he

was to have been a missionary of? European culture, yes. A fellah can sit a whole night long outside his hut and give himself up to dreams. But a great mercantile magnate in Europe dictates business letters in his automobile while he is driving to the theater. And in the parquet he writes telegrams. Soon he will be able to sit in his loge with a business telephone at one ear and listen to the music with the other.

And Christmas Eve he plays *The Dollar Princess* on his gramophone. Yes, God be praised for modern culture.

But a variation of the Bible phrase about winning the whole earth and losing one's soul occurred already in *Sigurd Braa*. "What use is it if I can one day take an airplane out of my waistcoat pocket and fly like an insect, if my soul is just as poor a thing as ever?" And Peer Holm says here the same thing in other words: "What use is it if the peasant can one day fly up in the air in a wheelbarrow if at the same time he has no more temples or holy days than now? What errands can he have up in the clouds, all the while he realizes no heaven over his soul?"

It is Faust over again:

Habe nun auch Philosophie,  
Juristerei und Medicin,  
Und leider auch Theologie  
Durchaus studiert mit heiszem Bemühen.  
Da steh ich nun, ich armer Tor  
Und bin so klug als wie zuvor.

And thus it is with Peer Holm. The technical prodigies of learning, enlightenment, the modern culture, what use are they, what are they all worth? How do they satisfy the soul?

And, as Faust goes seeking from his study chamber to Gretchen, so Peer Holm shifts his researches from machinery to Merle.

He lies in bed one night dreaming, after he has met her: "Oh, your mind has heretofore been so full of mechanics, of mathematical problems, of steel and fire. Always more zeal to understand everything, know everything, gain power over everything. But the psalm-tune in you, dead, and your hunger for that which lies beyond all this, growing greater and greater. You believed it was Norway you were yearning for. Now you are there, but is it enough?

Merle. Is that your name, Merle?

There is nothing to be compared with the first day of love. All you have theretofore learned, traveled, created, dreamed — that could all be burned quite up, you would let it all go. Now comes a spark, the whole lightens up, you stretch your cold hands out and warm them and have joyous quivers because a new happiness has come into the world.

And all that you ever understood about your relations to the immortal strain in your soul — and the Being up there — and all that infinite hereafter — that is all at once so clear that you lie here and shake with joy at seeing in yourself the solution to the eternal riddle.”

The hunger for the eternal in Peer Holm’s soul is apparently assuaged at last. God up there is no longer “the bloodthirsty Jehovah” but “the golden-haired Son of Light, himself,” who is paid reverence to at the altar by all the beautiful, love-animated natures with a hymn of joy. And in this hymn mankind can join — “We send hardly a fleck of foam to heaven from all the golden flood in our mind.”

As Marguerite asks Faust about his religion so

also does Merle question Peer Holm. And he answers with a series of questions. What do we know? What are we? He has no credo, no dogma. But "Merle began to smile, her mouth was very red and full, and finally she pursed up her lips and held them temptingly towards him." That is the answer. Eternity — what do we know about it? Only that it is contained in love's happy hour.

For some time it seemed as if Peer Holm would find peace in the idyll. He is happy in his love, he rejoices at getting peace in this world, which is his, he feels himself upon the pinnacle of his age's knowledge and notice how the impressions and information he has acquired become living and organic in his mind.

But the happiness does not last. He "unravels his life into a number of golden threads." And one mustn't do that. Why? Why can we not be satisfied to be happy? "Steel will not," says his half-brother, Ferdinand Holm, "steel does not want peace. And fire does not. And Prometheus does not. The spirit of man has still too many rungs to climb before it reaches the top. Peace. No, my friend, there is a power above you

and me who manages things. . . . The 'world-will' follows its own course. There is no one who inquires after our happiness. The Eternal will asks whom it can use and who is unnecessary. *Voila tout.*"

And Peer Holm understands that this is so. He is practically convinced that machine-culture and technical knowledge do not make men better or happier. For his own personal happiness he so much would prefer to live in joy with Merle on his farm rather than to wear himself out with sluice work and machinery. That does not matter, though, in the least. The work will not leave him in peace. As men's development cannot be turned back to an earlier form of culture even though it were a happier type so Peer Holm can not, for any great space of time, thrive in a more obscure place in the procession of progress than he once had reached. The spark of work in him is not extinguished. His talents cannot rest. The "earth-will," that is to say, nature, which has given him creative ability, will not let him escape. Peer Holm must forth once more and take his turn in working for the eternal progress.

But if he was previously fortunate in every-



thing, now this happiness deserts him. The ability is not less, but everything goes wrong. His fortune he loses through a failure. For one of his dams he makes an estimate of a couple of millions and reckons correctly and does brilliant work. But bad luck hangs over him. A vein of water appears in the tunnel where no one could have suspected it. One of his engineers makes a mistake that costs hundreds of thousands to repair, another usually sober man gets intoxicated and brings about a catastrophe. The work gets finished — to the wonder of all — but the cost has become so great that both he and his father-in-law, who has gone bond for him, are ruined. Then he invents a mowing machine. It has only one small defect, but, while he is rectifying this, a competitor steals the idea and makes a slight improvement, thus rendering his invention worthless.

Without money, so that he must have assistance to live, and broken in health so that he cannot work, this engineer of world fame finally lives like a poor peasant in a miserable hut. He has had to let his two oldest children go to others

to be cared for, and the youngest little girl is bitten to death by a dog whom a neighbor sets on her.

Thus he has sounded the depths of misfortune, is robbed of everything — all is dark about him. He is like Job, poor and childless, and covered with the plague. And he does not believe in God. What is left? Has life yet any meaning for him?

What is there worth while clinging to now? Work? This was the solution for Carsten Brandt and for Lea's sons, and others of them. The eternal value of work, the comfort in taking one's part in the creation of new sources of happiness for mankind — Peer Holm had known this comfort as well as anyone; but it had proved too small for him, his longing for "that which is beyond" becomes greater and deeper. And then when work fails? When the earth-will uses one and casts one aside like a worn-out piece of machinery? When all one's work ends by one's being compelled to eat the bread of charity and sit like a parish monument without hope of change? What then?

But then that bright, radiant love, which made life a festival? That helped the young Einar

Norby, that helped Ovidia in *Kjaerlighetens Oine*, and that helped many others. And Peer Holm had tried this, too. But his eternal hunger went beyond that. Love was much but it was not enough. And now unhappiness grew to such great proportions as almost to strangle love. When one stands face to face with suffering that one must go through with alone, so profound is it, what then?

But the children? Lea glimpsed immortality through her children's happy growth. Yes, for Lea's children lived and grew up and flourished and had children themselves. But when one's last little child died as a victim of a man's wickedness? What then?

Well, still there are happy memories. It was these the monks in the fairy tale rejoiced in. These it was that helped Eli and Sigurd Braa through trial and sorrow. Could they not help Peer Holm? No, they could not — the suffering was too great. Sigurd Braa and Eli had a surplus of saved-up summer feeling in reserve, and it was great enough to help them over their evil hour. When their happiness and their unhappiness are added together the sum is positive. The

great thing with them, that which differentiates them from most other people is that they in the evil day do not forget the happiness they have had, but can draw strength from it. But if, on the other hand, suffering is ten times greater than joy? If the reserve happiness is used up, and there is still a great way to the well of sufferings? What then?

Is there still anything beyond? Yes, there is still one thing. One can be greater than his fate.

When Peer Holm first feels what unhappiness is like, is when his sister Louisa dies — then he rebels against fate and against God. "It seems to him that God says: 'I will stretch out my hand protectingly over those who have parents and home, brothers and sisters, and a good income. But there is a boy who is all alone, who struggles and works hard as best he can — take the one thing he has. The boy's not much account. He can be made to suffer because he is poor, and I will topple him over — he's nothing to worry about. The boy's of no account.' "

The words resemble in a conspicuous manner those that are used in *En Pilgrimsgang* where Regina casts up her account against God. "The

girl's of no account," runs the phrase, there, also. And the feeling is the same as that which is the starting point for nearly all Bojer's dark characters. "One can be the moral slave of his enemies," says Sigurd Braa. And this is true whether it be God, or society, or an individual man whom one thinks of as an enemy. One can let fate reap bitterness where it has sown trouble, hate where it has sown suffering, and crime where it has sown enmity. When the Knight in the fairy tale fumes about revenges, it is because fate is his master; he does not control his own life but is its slave.

But is this necessary? Does a man need to let blind fate direct his life? No. One can be on his own part *ruler of his life*.

We have come here upon the kernel of the truth Bojer has been reaching toward, and which he has proclaimed in *Den Store Hunger*. One can be greater than his fate. The latter sows sorrow and man brings forth joy. It sows wrong and man brings forth generous forgiveness. It sows coldness and darkness and despair, and behold! in your heart grows up love which is stronger than all.

As early as when Peer lost his sister, we see that the suffering does not do him harm. He rebels against God. But it is not bitterness and hate that result, he does not attempt to crush others because he himself has been beaten to earth. But he seeks with his own strength to build a temple for the hymn tune which he feels deep down in his heart, and it is the same thing that happens even when his measure of suffering is full.

He feels how his character is cleansed and purified. As he writes to his friend Klaus Broch: "I saw a man go out into the night and shake his fist at heaven and earth, a poor-witted creature who refused to play in the comedy and was therefore washed down stream.

But I myself sat there still.

And I saw another mannikin cast out, a humble, white-faced ascetic, who bent himself and bowed down to the beat of the lash, and said: 'Do thy will, the Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away.' It was a poor creature who sneaked out into the night and disappeared.

But I myself sat there still.

I sat alone on the uttermost promontory of

life, with sun and stars gone out, and the icy, meaningless emptiness over me, around me, and on every side of me.”

But then he discovers that there is still a little inextinguishable spark within him. And it is strong enough to make him triumph over blind fate. He takes his last corn and goes out into the night and sows it in his enemy's ground. He does this not for the sake of the enemy; he does not do it because a god or a prophet has ordered it. But he does it as a symbol of his triumph.

One can hardly read the ending of *Den Store Hunger* without thinking of Victor Hugo. No one has praised more strongly and finely than he the heroism which Peer Holm attains to, which he shows in nobleness and high mindedness. Victor Hugo is the author one is most reminded of when one reads Bojer; it is more a matter of kindred spirits than of actual influence, but the understanding of people and the ideals are the same.

Why Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables* will remain one of the world's great characters is because he has strength to do the superhuman. He lets himself be sent to the galleys in order to save

an innocent man, and he saves the life of his bitterest enemy; he triumphs over blind destiny, because he is better than it. The same ideal appears in various places in Hugo's writing, especially and very forcefully, for example, in the novel '93. This treats of two men, Lantenac and Gauvain, who fight, each for his ideal, Lantenac for the monarchy and Gauvain for the revolution. But it is not the inspiration of ideals or the courage, the scorn of death in battle which makes them great men. They become heroes in the moment they actually desert their ideals, and step out of the battle in order to sacrifice themselves in a high-minded, entirely human action. Lantenac lets himself be taken by the enemy, in order to save three children from a burning castle and Gauvain calls down the sentence of death on his head because he will not fall below his enemy in mercy and magnanimity.

As in Bojer it is not the upright Brutus, but the generous and merciful Peer Holm who is standard bearer of ideals, so, in Hugo, it is not Cimsurdain, who — like Brutus — for honor's sake sentences the one he loves most dearly to



death, but Gauvain, who, in the name of humanity, forgives and saves.

Long ago Jesus, who in *Den Store Hunger* is somewhat superficially dismissed as "the ascetic on the cross," proclaimed it the highest moral duty to love our enemy, and one has the right to interpret the word *love* as practically synonymous to *doing good to*. This is just what Peer Holm does. But yet he is a far-cry from being a Christian. The ideal is the same. The intention is the same. But the power is different.

When the Christian "loves his neighbor" it is because God's love lives and acts through him. But Peer Holm doesn't believe in God. The strength others get from God he gets from mankind. When God didn't, men created dreams for him. The "divine" is, however, one with the deepest in man's own soul.

Therefore Peer Holm is filled with sympathy for men and pride in being a man. It is not really only he, himself, who triumphs over fate. He has never realized before but sees and understands it now: the human spirit has strength to be greater and better than the blind powers that

direct the universe. "By a careless law of nature we are thrust into a life we ourselves have no control over, we are ravaged by evil, by sickness and sorrow, by fire and blood. Even the happiest must die. In one's own home one is only on a visit. One never knows but what he may be off and away in the morning. And just the same, men smile and laugh in the face of their horrible destiny. In the midst of his serfdom, man has created beauty on this earth; in the midst of his anguish, has he had enough surplus ardor in his soul to send light out into the cold world spaces and warm them up with a God.

"So wonderful are you, O spirit of man. So divine are you in your own fashion. You harvest death and in return you sow dreams about eternal life. In revenge for your unhappiness you people the universe with an all-loving God."

Peer Holm feels that he helps "to create God." The expression savors of the mystic. But in reality it only means that he realizes the divine in himself, and through his acts sets it free in life. What he calls God, is also only a symbol, particularly of that which he feels has greatest worth, — "God" is really an ideal, and the ideal

is the outpouring of something at the well-spring of man's nature.

Now there are also in Bojer's earlier works certainly men who have made their ideals according to their needs, made God in their own image. But there are many false gods and only one true one. And the true God is known by the goodness of the deeds which are done in his name. As Björnson says: "Where good folk walk, there are God's paths."

Bojer has again and again portrayed the false gods — those whom men create to take the responsibility for their bad actions. One can, like Ovidia when she lost her beauty, and like the sorrowful missionary who preached discontent throughout the whole country, create a God for himself as a protection, to lighten his own bitterness by spreading it out over others. One can, like the knight in the fairy tale, call God into service in order to render one's wars of revenge holy. One can, like the different peoples in time of war, create for himself gods to slay his enemy with. But all these gods are false because the deeds which are done in their name are evil. They are

not created by great men triumphing over hard and blind destinies. But they are created by small, weak men who strike back when they are struck, and in their anxiety to defend themselves, say that there is a god who guides their hand.

Peer Holm sounds the lowest depths of suffering but he does not create himself a God who bids him cool his desire for revenge by punishing his neighbor for his sins or going out along the highroad to get other people to weep with him. But, out of the deepest good in man's nature, out of love, he creates the one, true God who knows neither hate nor revenge nor enmities but is made of mercy and generosity, the most sublime feelings men can feel.

Bojer has portrayed small men who let themselves be subdued by fate and do evil because they themselves have suffered some little wrong, and he has described greater men, who because of the happiness they have experienced, have strength enough to stand up against one's fortune, and preserve the wealth of their spirit. But high above them all stands Peer Holm. For all those who would escape responsibility — and

create a God out of their weakness — for all those who can not absorb themselves in their work and trust in the beneficence of the future, for all those who have not saved up enough holiday feeling to be able to carry them through unhappiness, this character points to faith in the divine in men's nature, and to the great problem, to lift one's self above happiness and unhappiness and take part in the creation of the goodness and love of God.

Peer Holm reaches the point where his hunger for the eternal is satisfied, and when he, in the darkness of the night, goes out to sow his last corn in his enemy's field, then we feel it as comfort and encouragement: he is the sovereign man who, by his own strength, triumphs over evil.

*Den Store Hunger* is not alone richer and deeper in ideas than are any of Bojer's earlier writings, but it is also, artistically speaking, the most mature and distinguished he has created up to the present. But the difference in attitude towards life which distinguishes the second from the third period in his authorship results also quite naturally in a difference in style. In the

skeptical, critical period his writing is stamped by the dissecting psychological analysis which results in producing a style that is bright with pregnancy and clearness; but after his optimism forces its way through, his style takes on more and more lyric color. That Bojer had ability for lyric description we already had perceived in spots here and there in the earlier works, and particularly in the fairy tales, but this ability is used and developed in the later plays and novels until, in *Den Store Hunger*, it comes to its richest blossoming.

There is an exceptional fineness and charm in the description of Peer Holm's relation to Sister Louise and of his home-coming to Norway and of the first coming of love. And his wife, Merle, is, next to Eli in *Sigurd Braa*, Bojer's finest woman character. As a young girl, when she sacrifices her own desires and has yet brightness enough to fill the home with sunshine and be comfort and encouragement for her sick mother, and as a wife in good times and bad, and finally in misfortune, she stands before us warm and strong, full of tenderness and rich in that ability of a woman to suffer and sacrifice without bitterness.

*Den Store Hunger* is a book full of life. There are numberless situations that are drawn in sharp outline and impress themselves on the memory. The shark fishing in the beginning is, for instance, a pearl of story-telling art, and nearly all the descriptions of Peer's life with Louise and his struggles to advance are presented with a genuineness and a graphic force that hardly could be greater. And the same is true of much of the following: the wanderings over the fields, the first meeting with Merle, the evening when they, too, feast alone, and, most especially, the evening when she has prepared everything in festive state for his home-coming and waits till at last he comes — and can hardly spare time to notice her because the work has completely taken possession of him.

But, despite all its life and graphic force, *Den Store Hunger* is still not actually a realistic novel. It has, as do nearly all of Bojer's books, something of the fairy tale element in it. Bojer has a fondness for the grand scale which is apparent here, also. Lea's sons did not merely cultivate the farm and work in the parish, but the results of their work reached out over the world and

were of use to all men. Hans Lunde became not only a leader in his district and a member of Parliament but he came to set his stamp on all public life. The missionary and agitator in *Vort Rige* infected the whole country with their ideals. Regina's searching for her child took on gigantic proportions. Andreas Berght in *Fangen Som Sang* had the ability absolutely to transform himself at will. Norby is not let go of till every shadow of doubt is erased in his soul, Wangen not before he has committed the crime he is accused of. Brother Gregory in *Paa Minderness Ö* has strength to last him his whole life through because of a single happy moment. Everywhere we trace this tendency towards the absolute, this impulse to carry everything to the ultimate goal; and this is true of *Den Store Hunger*, also.

First are shown the steps in Peer Holm's life. Everything succeeds for him, in every department of life; as a matter of course he is number one, engineer on a world scale, a power that no difficulty can deter. Then comes the period of rest in his life, and this also is absolute; the idyll fills his soul completely so that there is room for nothing else. And, in the end, he is



struck down by the acme of misfortune and falls as rapidly as he previously rose; everything is unsuccessful, everything crashes down at once, not one point of light is left in the darkness.

There is, of course, an element of danger in this exaggeration, this voluntary unsettling of the proportions, this majestic fairy-tale disregard for probability. But from it can come a certain grandeur in the portrait, something universal, which is attained with difficulty when everything is kept in scale. In *Moder Lea* the myth element and the realistic novel element existed side by side, unwelded, and the result was unsatisfying, but in *Den Store Hunger* the elements are combined, and the difficult thing has been accomplished. Peer Holm is, in all his life's single situations, a living, individual figure. But his career as a whole makes of him a symbol of humanity's eternal struggle.

There are writers who observe life with wondering respect. They love it without judging it, they desire only to serve it, and they paint it with meticulousness and dexterous realism, as it is mirrored in their minds. Johan Bojer is, as we

have seen, not of this class of writer. The deep excitement at the marvel of life one finds little of in his art. He does not content himself with observation; he probes and classifies. He does not humbly take his material out of life's hand, but creates it according to his own desire.

Bojer is, as none else in modern Norwegian literature, a writer of ideas. He thinks, broodingly and painfully, over life and its problems; he seeks to penetrate to the source of its laws, its ways, and its values, and the characters and destinies which he portrays are the expression of this thinking. "Art is realized philosophy," says Friedrich Hebbel, and the definition very beautifully applies to Bojer's writing, as it does to Hebbel's own. The characters in his books are but seldom there for their own sake, they are illustrations and examples; he experiments with them and uses them as objects for demonstrating; by means of them he states and develops his problems in symbolic form.

Both in Zola and Ibsen one finds something of the same thing; but it is chiefly Björnson, who stands as Bojer's most immediate and direct predecessor — not alone in regard to optimism

but also in his style. Also Björnson in his innermost soul was a preacher, too; also for him was it rather more often the idea and not the unconscious impression that was the starting point. But, in the beginning of the twentieth century, Bojer is a solitary figure, and he has often been branded as an epigon. This, however, is unjust. The form of writing that is his, has had and will have reason for existence and validity for all time.

The danger of a style such as Bojer's is that the unconscious impressions may be lost, that the whole effect, the right facet, the whimsical twists and turns may be wiped out or rendered stiff by the pushing to the fore of the ideas. But this need not happen, and as a rule, does not happen with Bojer. Most often it is with him as with Björnson: the characters which perhaps originally were brought in for the sake of the ideas, became luxuriantly alive in his author-mind, and developed into real human beings. And on the other hand this style of writing escapes easily the opposite danger, that which affects the realism of our day: — of becoming *klein kunst*, being taken by the surface

and not by the inner meaning, where the deeper perspective is found, and where what Oehlen-schägler called the "basic harmony" resounds.

There are two methods for writers to employ. They can increase our knowledge of humanity and our understanding of it, enrich our collection of world pictures, and deepen our feeling for life by picturing the differences, the nuances and the distinctions, showing us sides of life we don't know, and men whose spirit is new to us. But they can also give us the universally known joys. "It is not the individual and peculiar that is great," says Björnson, "although this is what glitters most; it is the universal, that is great, that lifts the heart and the thoughts and gives millions of echoes." The reason that Romeo and Juliet's words of love give our hearts a thrill is not because their love is of a different sort from ours, but just because, through them, we get an outlet, an expression, of what we ourselves felt or feel. The reason why Faust's monologue in the study is of such great effect is not because we become more deeply and strongly aware of our delusions and our own inner struggles. And why

Peer Holm's triumph over fate grips and seizes us, is not because we learn to know a new and piquant character, but because the generosity and mercy in our own hearts, which perhaps had become overgrown by pettiness and anxieties, stir, so that we know they are alive, and feel ourselves, thus, related to the triumphant heroism of the man.

And Björnson is right. That which — if one excepts comic writing — lifts a character up above the ordinary and makes it worthy to live, is not the complexity, the piquancy, all that distinguishes it as individual, but it is the universal quality and its significance for humanity, the animation, the power of feeling which it possesses. The more intensive, the stronger effect the character is to make, the more simple and humanly usual must he be. That which makes *Den Store Hunger* so distinguished a piece of work, is not all the small characteristics and realistic traits, but it is the strength of the feeling which rages in Peer Holm's soul, the eternal strife, that will not let him have peace before he attains to the point where the world is conquered and the divine reached.

If Bojer's writing in the future is marked to the same degree by this deep grasp and this great daring, then will his works live when that of most of his contemporaries is forgotten.

## VI

### SQUARING ACCOUNTS WITH DELUSIONS

IN the collection of fairy tales, *Hvide Fugle* (White Birds), which appeared in 1904, is found a story, *Drømmen* (The Dream), which, in symbolic form, gives the original type of a number of Bojer's characters, both in the novels we have treated and in those next following.

It relates how a young knight who, through treachery, came into his enemy's power, was held confined in a dungeon, where he must die of hunger and all kinds of ill treatment. But, however, he is freed by an enchantingly lovely fairy who loves him, and would take him to the land of eternal youth, there to wed with him. He is willing to follow her, but first he wants revenge on the man that has done him such great wrong, and she must wait while he gathers his followers together and goes forth with fell purpose against his enemy. She binds up his wounds

after the battle, and asks if he is ready now to follow her. "No," he answers — first he must find the one who dealt him this wound; before that one has been punished he cannot have peace in his own soul. Again must the fairy wait, and again he went forth to battle, and was brought home unconscious from his wounds. And hardly was he well again before he would have new revenge. In vain for her to tell him that the struggle would be endless; he answered that, this time, it was not himself he would avenge, he would conquer his enemy for his fellow men's sake, because this man had done much evil and was a curse to the whole country.

"Young Sir Knight," said the fairy, "begin you now to love unknown men, because there is one whom you hate?" But she talked to deaf ears; he set out to do battle again, this time against wrong and the evil among men.

And the battle was on. He realized that he had often done wrong — and he fought on to drown this consciousness. At last he became religious and fought for God and the blessed faith. Not till he is old, and has no longer strength to fight, would he follow the fairy to the



land of eternal youth — and then it is, of course, too late.

If we analyze this fairy tale, we see that there are two traits that express the Knight's character. One is that he is dominated by a single all-controlling feeling which blinds him and makes him set everything else on one side for its sake. And the other is that this feeling which began as something entirely personal, later burst its bonds and assumed an ideal character.

Both things are characteristic of most of the characters we are to examine, but we shall, for the moment, hold ourselves to the first stage, and by the previously used psychological process, make this clear by several examples.

In the great trial scene in *Moder Lea*, where Hans Lunde's wife, Inga, stood accused of child murder, we heard — while Inga herself was being led in — first something about the court's members and their different potentialities.

The advisory juryman had been to a political banquet till late into the night and had been waked in the morning by noisy carpenters. Because he had to get up before noon and undergo this exertion here in the court, he sat there in

a bad humor. Although he was scrupulous enough not to want to vent this on the prisoner, yet it had excited him nervously, and now lay in wait, back of his judgment.

The state-advocate's wife, the day before, had been delivered of child, and in the light of this fatherly joy, Inga's crime seemed to this man all the more frightful. He was firmly convinced that the severest penalty was the right one, and had prepared a profound and strong brief against the prisoner. The attorney for the defense was only concerned with the idea of getting Inga freed, and as he thought the surest means was to get a verdict of insanity, he had, without intermission, sought for a moment which could show her not in her right mind, and had based his defense on this, without making the slightest effort to enter into her state of mind or understand her motives.

Also the ten jurymen had prepared themselves for their tasks as well as they could.

The group consisted of four peasants, three schoolmasters, a tradesman and two laborers. Of the four peasants, two were religious and both had agreed beforehand that this was a grave

sin, so she obviously should be pronounced guilty. The two others were political opponents and, therefore, one was against Inga because the other was for her. All four peasants were thus saved head-work in this case.

The three schoolmasters, who had all fought for jury, when it was on the party program, agreed that they, with their practical layman's judgment, understood, in a very much better way, about law and justice than academic lawyers. But here their agreement ended, because one had an unexpressed visionary idea that all punishment vitiated the criminal, "he had read that in a newspaper, and, straightway, that had become his conviction." The other was afraid that the chief barrister would not respect him sufficiently, and he, therefore, was only concerned with making an effort to seem what he thought was expected of him. The third, finally, was concerned with making an impressive speech when the jury was called back — he knew not, in the least, what about, but only set his mind on being opposed to the others, because it seemed amusing to be different.

The tradesman was practically determined to

acquit the woman on purely conscientious grounds, because his own party organ for a long while had advocated the contrary. Both laborers agreed that punishment was only meted out to poor people, and so this attempt to have the farmer's wife declared insane had immediately awakened their distrust.

Each of these ten men had put on a look of wisdom. None of them was in doubt that his premature decision was essentially predominant, or that justice to-day should see the light.

We see, therefore, here a group of men-officers of the law and jury members, all of whom had this in common, that they were out of condition to judge impartially. A frame of mind or a passing feeling (as among the jury and the accusers), a general way of looking at life, or a personal predisposition (as among the jury members) had become the determining center of their consciousness, an association center, which was so dominating that it determined beforehand what new feeling and concept might get entrance into their consciousness.

Such things — as, for example, intense determining feelings — central predispositions,

which color all impressions, and even can bring about natural selection, so that all that does not harmonize with them is excluded, are of course well-known phenomena. A single annoyance can bring it to pass that one is in a state to be irritated by everything, while a great joy can make one see all life rose colored. A botanist, an aesthete, and a farmer will see different things in a pretty weed. To the botanist it is an object for study, to the aesthete a bit of beauty, to the farmer an enemy. The different central predisposition between the aesthete and the farmer not only leads to different interpretations about plants, but their interpretations set loose antagonistic feelings — respectively joy and irritation; it can even lead to antagonistic actions, in that one will seek to preserve the plant; the other, to destroy it.

The different central attitudes of mind lead also to different results, but therewith follows the possibility of the erroneousness of these results. Both the consideration of beauty and that of usefulness in the above example can be one-sided, and that leads to distortion in the interpretation.

This central predisposition, capable of eliminating, coloring, shaping and modifying, can, obviously, be extraordinarily fraught with destiny. Even the elements of which the central predisposition is formed can be false, founded on delusion and deception. Or this attitude of mind may have value in a certain limited area. But stretch its power beyond this, and it will lead to most disquieting one-sidedness and infatuation. Even false and one-sided and narrow views can have such an absolute power that those whose conscious life is controlled by them can, thereby, come to a completely deluded attitude toward life. The standard of values is faulty, and the greatest unhappiness and crime may result.

It is apparent to what a high degree the "dark" characters in Bojer are stamped with one-sided and passionate central predispositions. In *Et Folketog* and *Den Evige Krig* it is the *party*; which (for example in Hegge's case, and, in any case for a time, in Samuel Brandt's) has become the center of their soul life, about which everything turns. Regard for the party destroys these men's proper connection with other inter-

ests, their work, their relation to family, and society's claim on others for charity and real good feeling. This one interest has become the absolute standard in their judgment of life, and the one-sidedness, the falsification and distortion of all values, which follows, brings unhappiness to them and to others.

Also Hakon Hakonsen and Hans Lunde in *Moder Lea* look at life through glasses that falsify the picture. Two things determine their whole life's interpretation; the fixed conviction of their own boundless value, and the passionate impulse to see this usefulness recognized by others. Over-valuation of self makes them always lay the responsibility for every wrong on others instead of on themselves, and the thirst for prestige and popularity leads them — as is reasonable enough — farther and farther into humbug.

The following group of Bojer's writings, which takes its stamp from the three novels, *En Pilgrimgang* (a Pilgrimage) (1902), *Troens Magt* (The Power of a Lie) (1903), and *Vort Rige* (Our Kingdom) (1908), treat almost entirely psychological instances of this sort.

In the first of them, *En Pilgrimgang*, is portrayed a woman who had been betrayed and had borne a child at a maternity home. As she had no money and saw no way to care for the child, she submitted to its adoption by outsiders without being allowed to know who the foster parents were. Later, however, her natural longing for the child awoke, grew and grew, until, at last, all her thoughts turned on how she might find it again. This was apparently impossible, but all her ideas were colored by the desire so that the difficulties appeared less, and the moral scruples, which her course provoked, faded out.

There is a crucial and characteristic scene where Regina, for the first time, faced the fact that it would be necessary to commit an act which, in itself, was revolting to her moral instinct. She was about to marry a man whom she did not love, merely to get money and the chance to set on foot inquiries for the child. Her conscience, as has been said, revolted, but it was apparent that the passionate desire had such a power over all her ideas that it constructed a defense of her course of action with which she managed to satisfy herself; and the



author shows undoubted insight when he lets this defense speak for itself as a complaint against other people.

“What has this man done to you, that you should use him in this way?” she asks herself. “No, he has done nothing to me. But have not others used me also — and what have I done? First, Folden (the betrayer) — he used me to make his summer pleasant; he must have known that he, at the same time, was breaking a heart and laying waste a life, but he used me none the less, and God lets him live happily now.

“Then they used me at the hospital — they used me to study me — even when I was almost dead of shame. And the strangers and the doctor who stole the child away from me — they used me. Yes, and it’s even so with God. I have trusted him, but it seems all right to him too, not to pay too much attention to the girl. Let her moan — it’s no great matter. There is a married couple who have need of a child — they use the girl — it may, of course, bring her eternal unhappiness, but they use her just the same! There’s no need to consider the girl! —— ”

She is unhappy — feels herself injured; it seems to her that the whole world was leagued against her, and so she thought she had a right to strike back. From a dispassionate point of view, it is, of course, clear that the fact of people's having "used" her obviously does not give her the least right to "use" other people. But her point of view is wholly passionate. All the strength of her nature is directed towards the one end — to find the child. This is like a plank that she has caught hold of in the shipwreck of her life, and any means that seem to her necessary to use get the excuse of self-defense.

Therefore she married the man to get his money, drove him to his death so as to be untrammelled, and then set about moving heaven and earth to find the child. The author does not finish with her till she is far gone in monomania. All life's great confusion of interrelated aims and interdependent calls is, for her, simplified to a single problem: How shall I find my child? And so it ends by her going wildly and incessantly from place to place. Disappointment piles itself upon disappointment, despair

grows, but always she discovers new clues, new possibilities, which she recklessly sets out to follow. Never does she see any result, and never is she able to rest.

Regina in *En Pilgrims gang* becomes a criminal in the effort to get her child back again. In *Troens Magt* we hear of two men, Norby and Wangen, who both became criminals in fighting for that which each respectively felt to be right.

The book begins with giving us, partly, an introduction to Norby's character, partly, a glimpse of his state of mind at the time. We get to know that he is a capable and active man, but that regard for people's opinion plays too great a rôle in his life; when he had struck a bargain in timber he thought, first and foremost, with self-satisfaction, of others' lack of success, and when he was unlucky, he was irritated, not so much at the wasted money as at the fact that it was now other people's turn to hug themselves; we see also, that his ability, notwithstanding his sturdy character, is not within himself but is dependent on others' judgment, and we realize that this weakness can have dangerous results.

In the next place, his state of mind is a matter

of the moment: he has just had a matter go against him in the school board, which had greatly perturbed him. Then, his step-son had begged for a new advance on his inheritance, and this had added to his irritation. He is now in such a state of mind, that "each new irritation seems like a blow upon a previous wound," and when he then hears that Wangen has gone bankrupt, the two thousand which he had signed notes for, and which would otherwise not have played any important rôle for him, assumed the shape of a catastrophe. On the way home, with all these annoyances weighing on him, he began to get gloomy at the prospect of the scene which awaited him, when he must tell his wife that he, at his age, had signed a note, and now had lost money, so he sat and worked himself up to still greater anger against the man who seemed to him the cause of his annoyance.

Then he reaches home and is tired both from the long drive in the cold and from the various irritations. And we realize that all these circumstances, together with the comfortable snug room and the pleasant family life he now comes into — all combine to bring his intentions to the

single point: that he will have peace and will pay any price to avoid a scene. It comes about therefore, very intelligibly, that he, when Wangen's failure is mentioned and it is said that the latter had spoken of an endorsement, waves the matter away with a half lie, so that they get the impression that he had *not signed* the note.

Now rumor gets a start. If Norby had not signed, then Wangen must have forged. And the rumor spread rapidly. Norby was too slow in speaking to put a brake on the progress of the report immediately, and later, this became more and more difficult. At last, it had gone so far that his wife went to the justice of the peace and accused Wangen of forgery. And then Norby could not go about the country without exposing both her and himself to laughter. He brooded and brooded over how he could clear the matter up, and he began to realize how difficult it was, with the most upright and fair motives, to make a wrong right again. And all the while his bitterness against Wangen grew steadily, for he put the blame on him for everything.

There are three feelings, which, at this stage, control him: fear of scandal, of people's gloating laughter, and bitterness against Wangen. These feelings are strong enough to prevent his telling the truth. But they are not strong enough to make him resolve to continue the lie. He felt himself greatly to blame in the matter, and speculated constantly on some way out.

Then two new factors enter in.

First, Wangen, embittered by the false accusation, employed unworthy means in his defense. He tried to injure Norby on other scores, spread false reports about him, and sought particularly to exhibit him as a morally tarnished person. For this reason, naturally, Norby's bitterness against him grew still stronger. Then another thing resulted. Norby no longer had the feeling that it was he who was the accuser; he was certainly attacked by Wangen and had to put himself on the defensive. Then his conscience began to feel good. The fact that he was blameless in twenty accusations directed against him, made him practically forget that he was guilty of the one-and-twentieth. The wrong that was practised against him occupied him so much and

the thought of it so filled his consciousness that the thought of the wrong he himself had done shrunk and faded entirely into the background.

Then it came about that he began to be afraid. In the beginning he felt himself superior, and, when he had qualms of conscience, it was not least because he felt that it was mean to kick a man who was down. But when he found that there was someone who took Wangen's part, evil instincts began to assert themselves; he suspected that his arch enemy, Herlufsen, had a finger in the pie; he thought he perceived a plot against himself, and his thoughts began to center on how he should clear himself and show that he was the stronger. Joy of battle — the sporting fever, woke in him.

He was now so far from the real core of the matter that the fact of his having started a false accusation against Wangen grew daily more remote. He felt that he was now fighting for life and death, to clear his honor and his reputation.

Like Regina in *El Pilgrimgang* he felt that the means he employed were necessary — and, besides, his opponent was a poor fellow who

didn't deserve to be fought against with weapons that were altogether clean.

From here on to the last stage is not far. The feeling of his own wrongdoing had already been driven back by the sense of his opponent's wrong. At last it disappeared entirely. Norby had so often expressed his opinion about the matter that to remember his own assertions was practically like remembering reality. Self suggestion was complete, and where he, at last, bore false witness in court, he was, in reality, acting in good faith — almost convinced that he had never signed the document in dispute.

Meanwhile a similar development was taking place in his opponent Wangen.

The latter had, by his rash speculations, ruined half the parish, and he was well on the way to feeling pangs of remorse over it. He began to recognize his own inability and rashness, and to understand that it is not enough to have warm-hearted ideas when these ideas, as a matter of fact, only bring unhappiness upon those whom they should help.

But then came Norby's false accusation, and this served as a fruitful source for his self justi-



fication, which now could grow great and resplendent. It was a relief for him to be able to turn the accusation against someone beside himself, and he felt his own picture grow brighter against this still darker background. "His lack of guilt in this one matter was like a lamp which, suddenly, was lighted in his darkness."

What had happened was that he had got a new pivotal point for his thoughts and feelings. Previously, they had concentrated on his own guilt; now, they centered on Norby's. And the results became apparent rapidly. Norby's guilt swelled while his own dwindled. Since Norby had been able to commit that villainy, he would certainly have been able to perpetrate this and that. It was obviously he — Norby — who was the cause of all these pieces of ill-luck. That the brick-yard project failed, that money was lost, that the laborers were ruined — all these things, which previously weighed on Wangen's own conscience, he now transferred to Norby's account.

We see that the same thing had happened to him which happened to Norby; the wrong

that was done him took on, in his consciousness, such mighty dimensions, that the wrong he himself had committed dwindled and was supplanted. He felt himself a persecuted, innocent man, who must, of necessity, employ any and all means to defend and clear himself. And that ended, in his case also, with his really committing the crime he was accused of: *he forged a document and produced it in court.*

## VII

### BOJER'S PSYCHOLOGY OF CHARACTER

**I**N the year of Our Lord 1917, the analogy between Norby and Wangen and the contending parties in the world-war is so evident that one can hardly escape it. And Bojer's psychology could not have a greater triumph than to get world history as authorization. For can one well deny, that it is Norby's and Wangen's psychology one meets again on a gigantic scale in the opponents of the war! And here also it is the wrong done by the enemy which gives power and moral support in the struggle. Also here, each crime, each outrage on individuals and on mankind is defended as necessary and as reprisal! Yes, the crimes are forgotten and the consciences left clear. The whole conscious life is directed in accordance with an absolutely controlling central idea: that they are fighting a righteous war. Only what harmonizes with this gains admittance to con-

sciousness — everything else is disregarded, or colored and distorted until it corresponds. Each can mention examples; those who have taken part can, in each case, find them in their adversary.

Even the “neutrals” we find can in *Troens Magt*, particularly represented by Mrs. Thora of Lidarende, Pastor Borring, and Mads Herlufsen. But neither are they in a position to discover the truth and the right. They have personal sympathies, interests or various prejudices, that limit and determine their judgments. Thus the book’s effect is of a deep and bitter distrust of mankind’s ability to distinguish between right and wrong, between truth and lies — always there are extraneous things — moods of the moment, personal feelings, fear and love — which distort the picture and falsify the results. How can man learn really to judge with certainty? The boundaries do not remain fixed, the mind’s firmest foundations are shaken. But is the author wrong? Is his psychology false? The world war has answered.

We saw, in the fairy tale about the Knight, that the desire for revenge was not, of itself,

so powerful as to determine his whole life. But it grew, overspread the personal boundaries, and took on an ideal character. There came a time when the knight believed that it was no longer a personal hatred that made him fight his enemy, but love of unknown men, of truth and right, and even, finally, of God.

And this trait we can also find in a number of Bojer's characters. It comes out dimly in Saint Olaf, in the youthful drama of that same name and more strongly later in Peter Hegge in *Et Folketog*. His starting point is something personal; his unfriendliness toward Bergheiman and the decay of his farm. But he pictures it as something universal. Instead of reconciling himself with his enemy he fights him in the name of party-idealism, and instead of cultivating his farm properly, he runs away to fight for an ideal, he dreams of accomplishing state help for farming.

And likewise with Samuel Brandt in *Den Evige Krig*. With him, also, the beginning is personal. He feels himself under a vow to the dead wife to fight against his father, but the feeling broadens out, "his fancy paints his father

as a type of dishonorableness and arrogance; he saw this in large letters, and felt that all such aristocratic, autocratic, arrogant conservatives were his enemies. His dead wife, himself and all unhappy people must have redress." *All unhappy people* — yes, that is the ideal that drives him into the maelstrom of political strife.

This is true of Regina in *En Pilgrimsgang*; her search for the child takes on an ideal character. Is not the mother feeling holy? Is it not unnatural for a mother to forget her child? Is it not a holy privilege, yes, a duty, for her to stake everything on finding him?

And when Norby fights with Wangen, is it merely to get himself out of the scrape? Oh, no, it is in order that lying and swindling may be exposed and struck at so that right may triumph. And, with Wangen, it is even easier. This is certainly his idea in the matter of the eight-hour working day, in his attempt to help the laborer; this is the cause of his martyrdom. His enemies want to get a handle against him because of this, and *this* it is he fights for. The whole thing is a social problem, and when he uses trashy means to clear himself yet there is always

the comfort that he is not fighting only for himself but for "all unfortunates."

In *Vort Rige*, the next novel that Johan Bojer wrote, after *Troens Magt*, this instinct of the mind to create for itself an ideal in which to take refuge, becomes the central idea.

Erik Evige is, like numbers of his predecessors in Bojer's productions, perpetrating a swindle with idealistic intent. He acted in good faith, although he sometimes became fearful of building on a delusion. He suffered from a sick conscience and searched after ideals "as those who are sorely wounded desire water." A girl, whom he had deceived, later bore a child whom she killed. A friend, he had neglected to help, forged a note. This was the starting point. These two incidents did not give him any peace, and in order to get relief, he became first a clergyman, then a doctor, and then a labor leader. Sometimes these things helped, but, at other times, his conscience would not be quiet and he took to drink in order to gain forgetfulness.

At last he went home to his father's farm, and here he succeeded at last in finding peace and a basis for belief in himself. He put into

operation an idea he had long had in mind — to wit, giving the uncultivated portions of the farm to various poor men who thereby could get the opportunity to be independent and set up a home. The waste portions are reclaimed, one little home after another rose, and the happiness Erik Evige created here became like a holy place into which he could enter and find comfort. His trips of a Sunday to Nyland were like a sort of church going for him, and every time he had done something wrong, or the wound in his conscience began to give him a twinge, he found comfort in thinking what he had done at home.

But it so happens fate had decreed there should be quicksand in the ground where the new houses were built, and the state engineer, Rein, came and told Erik Evige that it was unforgivable for him to let men build there; a land slide might come and carry the whole place away with it.

This was a *grat catastrophe* for Erik Evige. Must he again become a spiritual outcast? These new homes — they were practically his religion, the sunshine of his life, that which made him believe life was worth living. If he must



lose these, what was life? He would not believe the news, clung to the hope that it was impossible. "Do you mean, then," he asked the engineer, "that even when an ideal helps us to be better, lifts us up from misery, and makes us stronger and somewhat more worthy men again, it can be, none the less, all humbug? And Nature doesn't care a hang that we are putting our whole selves into making right again the wrong we have done. That sorrows are ended, tears are dried, that the poor have a roof and bread to eat, and that a great idea is put into force that will have increasing results for centuries and millions of men — all these things Nature will let die and go to the devil?"

But it happened just as the engineer had predicted. The powers of Nature are blind, the quicksand takes no account of Erik Evige's fine intentions, and the land slide carried everything away, houses and men, in its course.

The engineer is the fault finder of the book and it is in him we meet the book's thought in its clearest expression. He stands once before the slide takes place and looks over the new land with its five small farms that Erik had, in

defiance of chance, succeeded in making habitable. And he thinks as he looks at them: "And these men believe that it is for themselves they are striving. But, in reality, it is also so that Erik Evige may develop his ideal. That's what it is. He has planted them there as others plant pine trees for a protection against the north wind. His father used men without pity in order to lay by something for his purse; Erik Evige did likewise for his conscience. The egoism of the one is equally as brutal as that of the other."

Then Erik fell to thinking about a clergyman who had become a fanatical political agitator, because he, in his time, had hurled dialectics at his poor mother. Now she was dead. But now he wanted to atone, and for this purpose all Norwegians would please lend themselves.

And he remembered a friend, who had lost his wife in a fire. In despair he became a missionary and traveled, finally, along the country roads with a singing and weeping mob after him. It gave him comfort to spread his own funereal state of mind over old and young, and when he succeeded in reducing newly married people's

happiness to the same despair which he himself felt, then he lifted his eyes to heaven and felt himself in league with God.

And the engineer asked himself: "How many men's souls have prophets and popular leaders crucified on similar grounds?"

In *Troens Magt* and *Vort Rige* we see the culmination of this scepticism and pessimism, which stamp Bojer's writings even up till the present time. The feeling about fundamental evil, both in the individual life and in society, is single-minded and consistent. When men do evil, then both they and others will go under because of it, even if they did not do it for its own sake. They do not do it merely because of pure egoism, conscious that it is evil. No, they do it with good intention, and they do it in the name of an ideal. The motive is egoistic; a little private feud, a gnawing wrong, a secret irritation, a sick spot in their conscience. But men are unaware of the egoism, for in good faith, they shift far from themselves the defense of their acts, and put it upon society as a whole, or upon an idea.

Here we face a feeling that has deep root in

the mind of this age, but which, at the same time, seems behind the age. The barefaced individualistic egoism, which, in the nineteenth century, was cultivated in the name of freedom, and, to so great a degree, set its mark on the spiritual life, has practically played out its rôle as a leading idea in the twentieth century. It is now collectivism, organization, coöperation, which is apparently to become this age's motto.

But the change is not without danger. It can happen with many, as with the knights in the fairy tale, that they begin to love unknown men or fight for the faith of one or other little personal cause. If one does not think only of political and religious movements, but of all the "questions" that assail modern society; prohibition, the woman question, defense measures, and so forth, is one not inclined to share Bojer's view? Are not these "ideals," I wonder, often nothing more than havens one takes refuge in for fear of being alone, and "the Gods," only what one creates for himself out of his mind's need? This egoism, this cavilling, this unconcern for others, which no longer dare to show themselves openly, these can thrive vigorously

when they are indulged in for "the service of a good cause" and this is so much the more dangerous, as it is so much more difficult to get a handle on anything when a moral defense is urged. Is it then without justification for Bojer to assert that it is not ideals but results on which everything depends. No great phrase or fine sentiment, no noble interest or ideal basis for feeling can stop a landslide or heal the wounds of battle.

These books were written before the world's war. But can one not see that they had their origin in an age which ended with the great catastrophe, in which people's concern was for small nations and great abstract ideas, because one wanted to get a handle on his enemy, in which millions of men in the name of patriotism under cover of national devotion gave way to hate and cruelty and declared every crime permissible if it served the "holy cause." The knight stormed through the world laying it waste — quite convinced of being God's chosen warrior. But *the spirit*, the good fairy, the land of youth and beauty, must nevertheless wait till it is too late.

When Knut Norby, after the suit against Wangen, received enthusiastic homage from the whole parish with speeches and music, his son Einar said — knowing the whole situation, and doing his own thinking:

“It is then true, that men’s holiest feelings and ideals are so completely blind, as to lend themselves to support a crime, a gross lie! . . . Can this be so? . . .

“Is there no guarantee in the fact that men’s words glow with the warmth of their hearts, that their eyes are wet and their voices tremble with emotion? Can this be?

“Is there then no single means of certainty that men are sincere? For the fact remains the fact — if we deck the criminals with garlands and send the innocent to prison, then good faith will be the thing of all things most dreaded. Because a man has fallen into his evil way with divinely good intentions, must everybody do him honor wherever he comes? Is this right? . . .

“And all those powers — God, the ‘fatherland,’ love of mankind, Christianity — shall all these let themselves be used like borrowed

clothes, be willing to palliate the crime and evil, to honor the lie? . . .

“Is this the way of the world?”

Let those who have lived through the last three years answer.

## VIII

### LITERARY QUALITIES OF BOJER'S WORK

THE three novels just discussed brought Bojer European fame. They were all translated into French, German, English, Russian, Dutch, Italian and Spanish, and particularly *Troens Magt* ran to several editions and drew an unusual amount of attention. The critics, especially the French and Italians, devoted themselves absorbedly to his writings, and *Troens Magt* received an honor that is seldom conferred on any but French books, that is, it was crowned by the French Academy.

What qualities are they that have brought these novels success? Especially two things: their absolute originality, really amazing originality of ideas, and the unique clearness of the reasoning in the development. One must, however, remark in this connection, that Bojer, in no wise, stands alone in the matter of his doubt



about human reason's reliability, and modern psychological researches, to a very great degree, have occupied themselves with the idea of the central concept and auto-suggestion. And one must admit, that various writers, for example, the great Russians, and many of the French, have portrayed psychological development of a similar sort to that which we find in Bojer. But this does not detract in any respect from his originality. His scepticism comes from personal and artistic experiences, and his ability to enter into the soul life's most secret labyrinths and paint what he finds there, compares especially well with the work of those authors who must have influenced him; there is not sharper analysis or clearer form in Dostoevsky's description of Raskolnikov's reflections before and after the murder, or in Hugo's narration of Père Madeleine's and Javert's soul battle.

All three novels are brilliant in construction, but obviously constructed. We saw already in the first group of Bojer's writings, that the starting point was the idea. And it is so here also. When one, *after reading*, thinks over these novels, one does not get the illusion of some-

thing living; they do not appear as slices of life and reality, but as the offspring of fancy, or rather, of speculation — like something that is invented in order to make clear and illustrate the author's idea.

One of Bojer's French critics has, quite wittily, compared *Troens Magt* to a play by Scribe, or a novel by Sherlock Holmes. The intellectual suspense is the same, and the degree of dependence on the dénouement also. But, in the one case, the point is that the hero shall conquer the difficulties, which are piled up. Every way out seems closed, and the suspense grows — but, in his innermost heart, one is convinced that it certainly will be arranged so that he can escape. With Bojer, on the contrary, the point is that "the hero" shall be caught in self-deception; he gets one chance after the other to get free, and the suspense grows as to whether he will not discover it and go free; but, in his innermost self, one knows that the author will arrange it so that he is caught securely in the net at the last.

But it must, in all honesty, be admitted that the idea of the action all being designed does not

present itself until after reading. During the reading, the author has one in his power, and there is no single point where one can point his finger and say: "here we are wide of probability."

The least noteworthy of the three books is probably *En Pilgrimgang*. It begins, to be sure, excellently. The picture of the lying-in hospital, the interior as a whole, and the various unfortunate mothers, is living and gripping, and gives a remarkable background for Regina's fateful decision to give up claim to the child. Regina, herself, is also, in the beginning, living and individual, but, afterwards, as the possibilities flicker out and the longing for the child, more and more, sweeps over her soul, the sharp-cut impression fades, and her character is only like a shell about the mighty passion that rages within her. As long as mother-love still is fighting to conquer other interests, so long is Bojer master of his material. But when, at last, this primitive, elemental feeling has conquered and become absolute, it gets beyond him. Nothing is more difficult than to paint primitive passion, which is forced to the point of ecstasy, and Bojer

has not succeeded in doing this well enough to carry the reader away. He gives the effect of the unrest, the eternal searcher's hunt from place to place — this is described and summed up in a symbol; we see the unfortunate woman jump up from her sleep in order to follow a new clue, and we hear the rattle of a cab in the night. But we do not live *through* and *with* her; we are not one with the passion that drives her forth. Bojer's style, which is so clear when it is a matter of analyzing, so sure when it concerns recording observations, and so artistic in expressing moods and feelings, has not strength enough, is not sufficiently kindled by personal suffering, to interpret a mother's primitive passion and despair.

In *Troens Magt*, Bojer's ability for penetrating psychological analysis achieves probably its greatest triumph. The searching investigation of what goes on in the mind before the material expression of a thought or feeling we found already clearly in *Den Evige Krig* — as in the great settlement between Samuel and Carsten — and to a greater degree, both in the description of Hans Lunde in *Moder Lea*, and of Regina

in *En Pilgrimgang*. But in no place does Bojer go so deep in his portrayal of the secret processes of the consciousness, and nowhere are the results he drags forth to the light so amazing, and, at the same time, so embarrassingly difficult to deny.

*Troens Magt* has the effect, certainly, seen from a distance, of a piece of architecture, but this is not because the individual characters do not have life. The book is, in reality, full of life and perspicuity.

From the old cottager who lies dying, and only needs to look at his wife for her to understand that he wants her to put his quid back in his mouth after he has received the sacrament, to Norby and Wangen, the characters are quite concrete. Wangen's attitude towards his wife is filled out by a number of small affecting touches, which perhaps, more than anything else, contribute to making him seem human. And Norby stands, in his great self-assurance, in his ambitious enterprisingness, in his goodness towards those subordinate to him, his weakness towards his wife, and his somewhat awkward tenderness towards his daughter Laura, like a

fully living character, presented from every point of view.

It is not because Norby's and Wangen's development respectively is not convincing. Wangen is, at every point, completely credible. Nor indeed can there be any objection made to Norby's psychology; not even the ineffectual interference of the son Einar can really be considered improbable.

No, that which gives the book the effect of being artificial is that everything serves to emphasize its central idea. Norby deceives himself, Mrs. Fhora, and Pastor Borring, and the whole parish judge subjectively and preposterously; and, at last, they give a banquet for Norby — for the criminal, and are ceremonious, affected to tears, and enthusiastic in his honor. Why? In order that the book's perspective may be the widest possible. There is no righteous man in Israel. They are all of a piece in being convinced that they stand on the side of truth and righteousness, and the whole group vies with each other in getting entrapped by lies and deception.

This it is, that gives the book its effect of

unreality. But it is, perhaps at the same time, its strength. It is, by this means, that it becomes so forcible. Just precisely its wide perspective makes it seem so bold, so embarrassingly personal; "Gentle reader, how is it with you and your power to judge? Would it be more reliable than these men's judgment?" The question seems disagreeable, and when one rejoices in being able to call the book "made-to-order," and anxiously looks for improbabilities to make much of — isn't it so that one may shake free of the question, and defend one's personal judgment against the indiscreet doubt?

*Troens Magt* is certainly strong but it is also a cold book; it dazzles more than it seizes. There is a something, certainly, of scientific sobriety in it; one is interested in the ideas; one is disturbed perhaps by them; but one does not feel with the characters; one has no sympathy with them. Quite otherwise in *Vort Rige*. Erik Evje is not merely split open and displayed like Norby and Wangen. The author has entered into his life and felt with him, and, therefore, he is a really tragic figure.

In 1902 Bojer published a novel and a play.

In 1903 came *Troens Magt*, and, in 1904, a collection of fairy tales, and a play. Then four years elapsed before *Vort Rige* was finished. To be sure, during these four years, Bojer was hindered by sickness, but it is hardly mere chance that it was precisely this book that took him so long to write. Its scepticism is more bitter, its smart deeper — all its tone more personal than any of the earlier books. One could imagine that the author had felt the same hurt in describing Erik Evje, as that which the state engineer had felt at needing to smash Erik's ideal. "It happens, now, that a man shows a little ideality on account of a one-time fault. He doesn't merely preachify about the poor — he does something real, which helps. He brings the matter before all eyes, and acts as a leader himself. In this man's mind there is nothing so great and beautiful done here in the country side. But then, you, Ingvald, step forward and kick the whole thing over."

It is the engineer's wife who is speaking, and the words sting. It is not delightful to go about pointing out the heartless blindness of nature's laws, and breaking into little bits



other people's beautiful illusions and precious ideals. The heart-sick feeling that fills the book's critical character is not the least gripping thing in it.

*Vort Rige* also has a wide perspective. It is said explicitly of Erik Evje, that he reminds one of "great spiritual leaders, who use men in the same way." And the small homes, which Erik Evje plants as a balm for his conscience, "as others plant pine trees for protection from the north wind," are felt as a symbol, not only of this single man's ideal, but of ideals in general. But, despite the symbol, *Vort Rige* is an absolutely realistic novel. Erik Evje, and his spiritual exile, is not only an illustration, but has value and meaning in itself. And the book contains, in several subordinate characters, pretty nearly the finest detail work Bojer has achieved; there is both Lars Broen, who is foolish enough to marry the wrong person, and there is, particularly, the middle-aged fellow, who, after the lapse of many years, finally was in a position where he could bring home the fiancée of his youth — thereby causing great disenchantment for them both, until at last death separated

them. The last scene is unforgettable. The land slide had overturned the house, and they are sitting up on the top to escape the water which is streaming in, but knowing that it is only a matter of a few moments before it will reach them. Then awakes all the young love in the old peevish wife. Her husband must strike a match so that she can see his face once more, and for the first time she discovers how old it has grown. Is it perhaps her fault? The match goes out, and the water rises steadily. But, suddenly, she thinks of all the times she has turned on him an angry, unloving face — perhaps every single day since they came together. If she could live it over again, or even once smile at him — as she now felt she ought always to have done.

“Bertil — haven’t you another match?”

Yes, he had still one, and he finds a dry place to strike it, and, in the glare of it, while the water draws nearer to them, he sees her smiling more sweetly, more lovingly, than he had ever seen her before — it was at last the real Ingeborg. The match goes out, and she throws her work-worn arms around his neck. “Oh Bertil,

Bertil — I — I have been so happy with you. . . .”

Everything is accomplished by small plain details, but the whole scene is infinitely fine and moving, a ravishing little gem, which only a poet could create.

IX  
LIGHT AND SHADOW — JOY  
AND SORROW

IN the same epoch with these three novels Bojer published two plays, *Theodora* (1902) and *Brutus* (1904), besides a collection of fairy tales, *Hvide Fugle* (White Birds, 1904).

Both plays treat the same theme as the novels, and are closely related to them. That which brings unhappiness on Regina, and Norby, and Wangen, and Erik Evje, is certainly their emotional nature; it is the blind passions, the mighty feelings, pride and compassion, anxiety and hope, love and hate, which overpower the clear judgment, and lead the reasoning power astray. In *Theodora* and *Brutus* we see two people who revolt against the tyranny of the passions, who want to be masters of their own lives and not let themselves be tossed about on the waves of passion.

*Theodora* is full of "a consuming passion for that which is white as snow, and high as heaven,

and true as God himself." And she seeks it in the line of pure reasoning; mathematics is her heaven; "Where there is neither anger nor doubt, sin nor sickness, everything is high truth and glowing clearness that broods over our blind passionate lives like a starry heaven over an evil earth." But, in order to reach to these heights of pure reason, she has to fight her feelings. Theodora will not let herself drift; she will select and choose among the powers within her, and, therefore, she is an enemy to the heart, which "always lies in wait to strike our reasoning in the back."

So she sacrifices her filial feeling for her old father and her love for the man she desires. Only one feeling she will not sacrifice: she wants to be a mother; she will have a child to live for besides her mathematics. But this weakness has its revenge on her. She cannot manage to divide herself between the two "children," the child in the cradle, and her spiritual foster child, mathematical disputation. The child dies, and she is tormented with the fear that she has neglected it. The passions which she has so long striven to exclude from her life,

stream in upon her now, and overwhelm her. The conflict in her between the body, which she can not escape, and the clear pure heaven of thought, which she *does not want* to let go of, becomes so strong that she is broken. The manuscript is thrown into the fire, and, like so many other "problematic natures," she ends by killing herself. Is it because she is a woman that she does not succeed in shaping her own career as she wishes, and, in the light of clear thought, becoming master of her own life?

It would seem so, because, in Brutus, we see a man fighting the same fight, and he wins.

Brutus strives like Theodora with the dark powers which bedim the clearness of one's thought and weaken one's will. He feels it harder to hold in check the legions in his own soul than to discipline an army. But he fights to accomplish his aim, and becomes stronger than his own hate and his love, and never lets himself be moved from that which his clear brain tells him is right. Only thus is he able to be strong enough to carry out his great task; to "create a Rome, where every man wears a stainless toga."

There is a remarkable little scene, where the problem is clearly presented. It is Brutus and his wife Virgilia who talk to one another:

BRUTUS: Of that time when I had to inquire into myself so closely in order to be able to answer the claims brought to my notice, I have a bitter recollection of a weakness that cost Rome dear.

VIRGILIA: Was it long ago?

BRUTUS: The first time we fought the Carnerienses, they brought a young leader of their soldiers as captive to my tent: I sentenced him to death.

VIRGILIA: Was he very young?

BRUTUS: It was a glorious day in spring time. The plains of Arsia were red and white with flowers, and the young chieftain — his eyes were like a fiery stallion — fell on his knees and begged me to spare his life.

VIRGILIA: Was he perhaps twenty years old?

BRUTUS: His mother was led also and knelt beside him.

VIRGILIA: And you — what did you do?

BRUTUS: His young wife came finally, and she had a child in her arms.

VIRGILIA: And she looked at you, and knelt also?

BRUTUS: The hardest thing was that she resembled you. It was just after you had borne our son, Titus. And the little baby was not afraid of me, but stretched both its hands out to me.

VIRGILIA: Brutus — tell me — what did you do?

BRUTUS: In a word, I took them into my tent, gave them to eat and drink, and let them go.

VIRGILIA: [*In an outburst*] Brutus!

BRUTUS: But the same young man gathered a new army against Rome, and that one head which I had spared cost Rome two thousand.

VIRGILIA: In the name of the Gods!

BRUTUS: Tell me, Virgilia — was I good that time?

VIRGILIA: Yes — yes!

BRUTUS: No, that time I was evil. The good act is known by the good consequences. To be good is often only the avoiding of the pain of being right. But that is to be nothing but the slave of tyranny in one's own breast. Next time I will be a free man.



VIRGILIA: I see why men call you cruel.

BRUTUS: You ought to remember how much easier it is to be gentle.

But Brutus conquers his natural mildness. And, when he is put to the great test, he shows himself greater than his fate, and sentences his own son to death for the sake of the right.

Is Brutus really the solution of the problem which is propounded in the novel? Is it this rigorous idealism, akin to Brand's, which he sets up as the standard? It is demanded that the will, building on pure reason, shall be in absolute control, and that the heart-life, with feelings and moods, shall be shut out, because it can lead one astray, and create unhappiness on this earth. One remembers Olaf, the engineer among Mother Lea's sons, who prized machines because their essence was clearness, and because they never could go astray, never lie, never be muddled. "There's a whole religion in that," said Olaf. Is this the truth as Bojer has discovered it in his life? Are we to become like the "honest," "clear" feelingless machines? As the problem is propounded in the novels, it seems difficult to arrive at any other conclusion.

And isn't this what one has to gather when the engineer, Rein, in *Vort Rige* is soul-sick over the necessity of shattering ideals, for the truth's sake?

One must, however, be chary of holding to this conclusion too fixedly — among other things, because this would make the warm, strong optimism of Bojer's latest works, *Sigurd Braa* and *Den Store Hunger*, an entire mystery. *Brutus* is, however, not anything of a problem novel but a tragedy. The difference between Theodora, who does not succeed in conquering her personal feelings, and Brutus, who does, is not only that the former is a woman, and the other a man. The difference is caused, in even greater degree, by the fact that Theodora is a modern, and Brutus is not. It is scarcely to be said that the whole problem in *Brutus* is rendered unreal by laying the scene in ancient times. The character which Brutus has created of the heroic consul of olden Rome, is a result, which his logical poet's imagination leads him to. But it is in nowise a subjective solution. There is here no pretense of anyone's teaching life-wisdom for modern people.

If one wishes to know the author's personal solution, one must go to Einar in *Troens Magt*, Knut Norby's son. He is faced by an entirely analogous conflict to Brutus. Brutus is forced to sentence his own son, and Einar to witness against his father. Brutus knows that his son has done evil; Einar knows that the father's accusation against Wangen is false. The parallelism is thus complete; in both cases the conflict is clear: the decision rests between personal feelings and abstract right.

But the solution is different. Bojer does not demand of the modern character, Einar, what he asks of the remote Brutus. And the solution, as far as Einar is concerned, gives so much more personal an effect that he, before the great test comes, has held just those ideas which we have seen in Bojer's earlier books. But Einar deserts his principles when it comes to himself; he can not act contrary to his feelings for his father and his home — and so the innocent man is sentenced, and the unrighteous triumphs.

It must, however, be remarked, that although Einar thus fails at the crucial moment, he does not fall so much under sentence by the author

as do all the remaining characters of the book. He is not exposed, nor is sentence pronounced upon him, but he is treated sympathetically, even with favor. And what is the secret, what is it that saves him? It is his affection.

This may, at first glance, seem strange. A weak and unsatisfactory solution. Why should he be allowed to run away from the defense to a happy love? But when one thinks about it, one understands, after all, what Bojer means, and sees that, from this point, the way is easy to his later books. Einar is driven by his affections to do wrong; we understand that he must do it, and we understand that he dares to — for the sake of his love. Such is life. We get painful blows, run up against difficulties that we can not surmount, that master us instead. But it is still worth while living — for love's sake.

“Do you wonder sometimes what actually you believe, Ingvald mine?” asks the engineer's wife in *Vort Rige*. One could have asked the same question of the author, and the answer would have been: in the power of love and beauty to prevail, *despite everything*, and make life a wonderful place. Troubles and problems,

difficulties and sufferings, are like iron, that we could never force our way through, but that melt in a moment, in the sunshine of affection.

We meet this faith for the first time in *Hvide Fugle*. This collection of fairy tales begins with a little story — *Kjaerligheten's Oine* (The Eyes of Love) — whose theme Bojer liked so much that he later used it in dramatic form. And it is not without cause. Both the tale and the play (which was published in 1909) are among the finest things Bojer has written, and are, in an eminent degree, characteristic of him as an author.

*Kjaerlighetens Oine* treats of a young girl whose beauty and fresh joy of living have such power that everything about her is impressed by them. The cross-grained, niggardly father, the out-of-the-way farm, the sour, unwilling servants, all are transformed, all life is brighter and easier because of this young and beautiful woman; "all that the father owned was like a cloak which must be pure and sweet because it must be put on the shoulders of his little girl, his only one."

But then unhappiness came upon them. In a

fire she was so burned that her face was disfigured with great red streaks. People tittered and mocked, children cried out when she showed herself. And she herself was smitten to the soul by the unexpected ill fortune, so that she became suspicious and bitter. Every time a laugh rang out in the house she thought it was she whom they were laughing at, each time she was hurt afresh, and brooded over it — and always the desire to hit back grew stronger. After some time she gave up the solitary life she had first courted; she took over again the management of the house, but was now wholly changed. She felt herself constantly in a war of defense, and every time she discovered a fault in others, it became a weapon to be used against them. Her bitterness made her hard and angry, so that she became a scourge for the whole house. Then it happened that she met a man, who had loved her from her youth and who was blind and suspected nothing of her accident, and through her relations with him she was transformed again. The fact that he always thought of her as the light-hearted, lovable, splendid woman, who brought happiness and beauty to everyone

about her made her try to be so again. And her desire to paint every thing in the most beautiful colors possible for the man she loved, opened her eyes again to life's loveliness.

When he heard later, that "a great suffering had touched her face with its beautiful hands," it had no effect. To him she was always the same. And her spirit really was again the same as formerly. She thought now only of making other people happy, as she was herself, and all the world was lovely as she was in the heart of the man she loved.

The young woman is like a symbol of the kernel of Bojer's writing. When one conquers his involuntary fear of approaching poetry without leniency and hard-heartedly, analyzing the piece of writing, one sees that the basic idea, in its simplest form, is the same as that which we have found, more than all else, in Bojer's writing. Everything begins subjectively, that is to say, it is the feeling that controls one — which puts its stamp on life for one and one's environment. When the young girl is attacked by ill fortune, and bitterness triumphs over her soul, then all songs and joyousness are hushed in the

house; her wound makes her wound others; her bitterness makes others bitter; her suffering stretches beyond her, and creates new suffering where her's ends. But, before the unhappiness, when she bloomed with youth and beauty, and, later, when love had made her gentle and happy again, then joy is created around her, the sunshine in her soul calls out the good and beautiful from everything and every place where she is.

This disposition to see in a person's master emotion the germ of one's own and others' destiny is, in itself, not a cause for either pessimism or optimism. But it can be both.

Evil creates evil. Enmity begets enmity. Pride and anxiety and secret wounds in the soul, yes, even mother love and filial affection can lead to unhappiness and crime. And there is no certainty that a man is sincere — as like as not the passion is masquerading in the character of an ideal. The young girl in the fairy tale creates a God according to her own needs so that her conscience may be soothed and her scourge strike harder. This is the dark side of the power of passion, and while it is this theme which is



being emphasized, the writing is felt to be pessimistic.

But happiness breeds happiness. Joy brings forth joy. Beauty and love and brightness make life full of sunshine, and "each single bright thought is like a rose that wafts its fragrance out over the earth." This is the bright side — and from the time when this pushes into the foreground, it is optimism that triumphs.

The scepticism and bitterness that filled *Troens Magt* and *Vort Rige*, and the hymn to youth and love and the joy of living, which issues forth in *Kjaerlighetens Oine*, are not irreconcilably opposed; they are only *two sides of the same thing*.

Now we understand also, why Einar in *Troens Magt* could be saved from the darkness. He fails in his duty for the sake of his affection — yes, but think how immaterial! He is just betrothed, love's first, overpowering happiness fills him — is that not infinitely more important?

The same homage to love and youth and beauty which we meet in *Kjaerlighetens Oine* appears in most of the other tales in *Hvide Fugle*. In one of them, *Paa Mindernes Ö* (In

the Isle of Remembrance) it is related how five old monks after a busy life of fellowship, found a small society, which is called "The Shining Word of Remembrance," in which they will recall their lives not with repentance, prayer, and sorrow for sin, but remembering all the joys that life has showered on them, the golden beakers they have emptied, and the beautiful women who dowered them with their love.

The joy of living and repentance are directly contrasted in the tale, *Ildblomsten* (The Fireweed), which treats of two pilgrims who are on their way to the holy sepulchre, in order to bewail their manifold sins. They meet a young woman and the thought of her reawakens their joy of living so as to move one of them, Don Alfonzo's, heart. The meeting was but short, but yet it seemed to him, that the way was less dusty and the heavens less hot, and he began to see beauty in the brooks and trees which they passed. The thought of the beautiful woman grew more and more insistent in his soul and filled him with brightness and joy, but his companion, Irjam, still was sunk in despair over the thought of his sin and the world's baseness.

They came to a rosebush and Irjam cut a branch, tore off the roses, and made a crown of thorns, which he set on his head in remembrance of the Saviour's suffering, and to mortify his own flesh. But Don Alfonzo, who also had picked a branch, removed the thorns, and put a beautiful wreath of roses about his forehead. Then he knelt beside Irjam and thanked God that there were roses on earth.

And so they rode on, side by side, one bowed and racked with the pain of his crown of thorns, his face bloody, the other with the crown of roses on his head, and upright in his saddle, because he was filled with thankfulness over the beauty of the earth.

At last, of necessity, their ways diverged — one went on to weep at Jerusalem, the other turned, and went back through the wilderness on a pilgrimage to mankind.

In the collection's last narrative the tale has, finally, become a myth. The Christian God and Don Juan are set opposite one another and Don Juan conquers.

When Don Juan stood before the great judgment seat, and God wanted to have him cast

into uttermost darkness, he defended himself by saying that his only guilt was that he had appreciated the beauty of life. "My guilt is, that I have loved and worshiped the most beautiful creations which came forth from your hand, and I knew no other hymn of praise to them than to deck them with my kiss and caress."

But God answered that Don Juan's love had really spread death and sorrow in the world; he must think of all the women he had ruined. Don Juan then asked that he be brought face to face with his accusers, and God asked all the women whose unhappiness he had been the cause of to stand forth.

Then it so happened that when God asked them to hurl their accusations at the deceiver and describe their sufferings, they looked at Don Juan, and blushed, and answered that they no longer remembered this. And when God would still sentence Don Juan, there arose a commotion among all the young women he had betrayed on earth, they cast themselves down before God's throne and sobbed out: "Save him, save him!" And God wondered and asked if they had forgotten all the trouble they had suffered for his

sake. But they answered that it was nothing to the lasting happiness he had given them. "Even in my worst agony I was still more happy than in the years before I met him," said Donna Elvira. And Donna Annunziata added, "Never was my trouble so great but my happiness was still greater, and many times I rose in my cell and folded my hands and blushed because I thought of him." And they called all the happy women who had ever loved to their aid, and millions and more millions gathered before God's throne and begged for the betrayer.

But God would not yield. He took a stone in his hand and said that, until this blossomed like a rosebush, he would not receive Don Juan into his heaven. Then Donna Elvira took the stone and breathed on it, and all the other women whom Don Juan had betrayed on earth, and all their sisters who had known love's sweetness, gathered about the stone and breathed their warmth upon it, watered it with their tears and shone upon it with their smiles so that it might blossom like a rosebush and so that the deceiver might gain eternal happiness.

"And what stone could long hold itself hard

under that warmth?" Soon — there stood Elvira with a blooming rosebush in her hand, and God had to admit, that, to the love of women, nothing is impossible, and gave Don Juan a place in his Heaven.

"But Donna Elvira planted her rosebush beside God's footstool so that he would remember that no one must be doomed who has loved."

In all these tales the same mood prevails: the pursuit of the spontaneous joy of living. This joy in the freshness of the moment, without thought for the future, this belief in the power of beautiful remembrance, stands in direct opposition to the fear of what is to come, and all regret over that which is past. Gylva in *Rörfloiterne* (The Wind in the Reeds), who sits in prison and undergoes the most dreadful suffering for the sake of her love, says these beautiful words: "I did not suffer so much in the long year as I must rejoice in one poor hour. If I were to pine here a hundred years, yet is this no equivalent for a single moment in Urmar's embrace." They pay the penalty for long years for a joy that is only a poor thing at best — oh, yes — their vice, of course. And, in J. P. Jacob-

sen, the accent is on the suffering undergone, while in Bojer it is on the joy. There springs neither sorrow nor grief from his red roses, but so delightful are their beauty and fragrance that they fill the heart even of the old and gray-headed with summer's sweetness, even if they must be paid for by a whole life's misery.

This is an attitude towards life which is akin to Stuckenberg's; the same joy over remembrances, the same scorn for those that speak evil of the departed, the same deep gratitude towards life. But the tone is more high pitched than in Bojer, the happiness more exuberant, the reveling in beauty and love stronger, more joyous. But Stuckenberg's poetry was, of course, the expression of personal experience — *Hvide Fugle* is a fairy tale collection.

Bojer has never written verse — he wrote fairy tales instead. From the very beginning of his writing, we meet these fairy tales, side by side with his novels. In the beginning, he struggled with this type of writing; often they were banal, often altogether too strained and profound, often the symbols were obscure, and the style lacking in confidence. But, later, he gained the

mastery over this medium, and the best of the tales in *Hvide Fugle* are faultless miniature pieces of art, the charm of whose style is capped with clearness of thought and wealth of feeling.

Even though the characters and symbols of a fairy tale do not give so direct an outlet for a poet's feelings as the subjective lyric, yet they can, assuredly, convey an emotional message, which lies deeper than that we can get from novels. And if one wants to understand the profound optimism of Bojer's latest works, then one must not forget, that when his scepticism found utterance in the great heavy novels, his heart's innermost gladness created charming small fairy tales in praise of life.

## POLITIKEN

*November 25, 1917*

Johan Bojer: *Verdens Ansigt*, 234 S. Gyldendal.

Among Norwegian authors Johan Bojer is the one through whose art the heart-beats of the age and of mankind most livingly and intensely throb. He is the one who, with the greatest absorption and unceasing interest, observes and



describes "*the man of the hour*," and his books, which spring from an active and ardent temperament, seem always like reports of the time and circumstances in which we live, and towards which we steer our course.

In *Den Store Hunger* (The Great Hunger) it is true the account is of the Universe, the "blind" powers that guide it; hence this book has an abstract flavor. In *Verdens Ansigt* (The Face of the World) it is description of men, a complaint against the demand of the whole upon the sympathy of the individual, causing a sense of responsibility for all pain and all wrong. This book is a sheer cry of distress from a man whose life is laid waste, poisoned and ruined by the limitless misery which is outspread upon this earth, a cry of distress from a man who becomes unable to look upon his own life's happiness and brightness and enjoy it, because the pain and sorrow of mankind overwhelm him, beyond help and saving. He who has once seen the world's distorted face, never recovers from the overpowering impression. He hates her white, bloody visage, because it is always staring back on his joy and his bright thoughts.

And, if he drives it away a single time, in a rare and happy moment, he must, with his bewitched conscience's most strained effort, recall it anew; therefore he is wounded in his mind by suffering's dreadful weapons; he is filled with anxiety for the soul's happiness and the body's welfare. And then he discovers that his unhappiness takes its origin in his need to let his mind live and suffer with all mankind, and so he pulls himself together and attempts to help an individual man over a "purely moral difficulty," and fails in this too; it is impossible for him to intrude upon another man's soul and inner life. The account of this last and decisive development in his life's disillusionment is the book's most profound section, at every point flawless in its psychological consistency; and the minor characters, which are here brought to the level of the chief characters, are painted with a penetrating clearness that can only find a possible analogue in the world literature's most renowned works. But this man, on whom the world and mankind rests its sharp, pained glance, sinks, and attempts, in his wretchedness, modestly and sadly to console himself with the unworldly ideas of those great

solitary men "who were dreamers on mankind's way," those men, because of whom "it is no longer dark upon this earth."

There is an unbroken line from *Vort Rige* (Our Kingdom) to *Verdens Ansigt* (The Face of the World) and the "optimistic development" in *Sigurd Braa* and *Den Store Hunger* (The Great Hunger) seem to have been an episode in Johan Bojer's writing, perhaps as baffling as beautiful and glowing. It cannot be denied that, in this his latest work, the writer has firmer ground under his feet than in *Den Store Hunger*. He has here again let his art shine through and base itself on established truth and bitter reality's sharp light and immovable foundations. He has created a work of art, under whose masterly and superb technique is reiterated the question: Who is the man, strong enough to repress a cry over our environment's dark and nameless pain? But, in the face of deep and heavy misery, there is relief in a cry.

RICHARDT GANDRUP

## POLITIKEN

*November 23, 1911*

Johan Bojer: *Liv* (Life), novel (C.B.N.F.).

*Liv* is what Johan Bojer has called his new book, and it overflows with life, has light and shade, warmth and chill, like life itself. And, for the first time, is his art wholly living, wholly amalgamated with his material, wholly rounded and mature. He has, in others of his books, discussed deeper subjects, but, not invariably, been able to come out free and uncomplained of, set himself more difficult problems, but often solved them more according to a prearranged scheme than according to life's own solution. Strong enough not to overstrain himself, he has grown in power every time. Now he carries life in his arms without staggering, almost with a little vain smile at the fact that it doesn't weigh more.

Naturally it does, and he will not remain oblivious of this. But it is an outlet for strength, at times, to believe one's self so strong!

Whoever has followed Johan Bojer's artistic

development, will understand what he has accomplished in this book. Whereas he previously rattled the chains of a problem, he now casts himself into life's mad whirl, in love with its manifold rich possibilities, with his heart open for its great things and its small happenings, happy in the feeling of being part of it, and unafraid of its shadows. He has learned several things in the passing years, both of himself and others, finally, "that one must make one's self respected by destiny"; as the book's chief character, the painter Paul Tangen, expresses it, "be the one to attack — as it were, give it a kick and say "Three blows from life, my friend; of us two, I intend to be master."

Ah well, this thing is good to have attempted even if, as Paul Tangen himself had to admit, it is of no great avail in the application; but I wonder if this isn't one of the things that Danish authors sometimes are so willing to forget? Most of our own books in the last few decades are written with a different motto than "it is better worth while to conquer opposition than to knuckle under." Much opposition has not been conquered in modern Danish literature,

either artistically or humanly speaking. But it is by the strength of this self confidence, of this triumphant endurance, that Johan Bojer has come eventually to control his material completely. "He who sows death can not reap life," but he who plants life, gets life in return, even from death. This is the difference between Danish and Norwegian literature in our day — a contrast which now is disappearing, but, in which, we, up to this time, for a long while, have been the weaker.

All the way from Björnson's youth and through Lie, Kielland, Amalie Skram, Norwegian prose has been stronger than Danish, whose only point of superiority was that poor concept, style. Norwegians did not force themselves to put on a stylistic straight jacket but wrote freely and indiscriminately, at their own good pleasure, and carried off the laurels in this way. Art must be raw in preference to being conventionally well-bred.

Johan Bojer's novel is not of this class, but fresh, lusty, mature. More rich in characters one is glad to meet and in thoughts one cannot forget.

How pleasant to review a book that one has read with pleasure. It crops up in one's consciousness like the face of a person one has come to love, it persists in one's thoughts and gives rise to new ideas. It is like a gift the kindness of which stays in one's heart! Is there a fault in Bojer's book? Like enough, but I did not discern it: it is lost in the abundant richness, like a piece of chaff in the pile of pure grain that stands before me, and I have no curiosity to go peeping and saying: "See — here is some chaff. You could have winnowed your grain more carefully!"

Sometimes it is the critic's task, with a sweeping gesture to draw attention fixedly to the whole, and such is the case here. And yet no summary of the novel's contents shall be given; that cannot be done without doing wrong. It is a book of the mountains and of Christiania, filled with a love-song about Norway.

"Many miles away rose and sunk the white horizon. The clouds there assumed fantastic shapes of men and beasts. Two lovers stood in the North with their heads beneath the clouds and gossiped as from all eternity, a rift in a

mountain is a valley with many parishes, and beyond are more mountains and more rifts. That is Norway." . . . "I believe almost all Christiania is going to the country," says one of the book's characters. "Yes!" says Tangen, "are you so much out of date as not to know the great religious change in Norway? The churches stand empty in summer time, my friend, for the gods of our day have flitted to the mountains."

And, in the mountains, many of the novel's most delightful chapters find their setting, chapters filled with a fresh air one longs for. Here also, another of the chief characters of the book, Reidar Bang, meets the woman who is his fate. She is the best drawn of all, a dreaming, solitary, defiant, devoted woman, perhaps the most superb character in all Bojer's work. The final chapters, when she at last, too late, becomes Reidar Bang's wife, mark, for the moment, the high point of Johan Bojer's art.

Johan Bojer has, previously, for example, in *Troens Magt* (Power of a Lie) brought together more original ideas than in *Liv*, but in no place are presented more living characters. What is the greatest thing? A thought can be



great and a character can be great, but, in art, that is greatest which is most nearly perfect. And he has never in his other works presented anything so nearly perfect as the best chapters in *Liv*.

It is a book that will live.

L. C. NIELSEN



## APPENDIX

### THE GREAT HUNGER

BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

**I**N reviewing this novel by the distinguished Norwegian writer Johan Bojer (or Boyer, as we should spell it in England) I labor under two advantages. It is the first work of fiction I have ever reviewed, and I am acquainted with the previous work of the same writer, whose novel, "The Power of a Lie," must be well known to English readers. I come to it, then, with a mind hopelessly untrammelled, and a predisposition of interest in its theme. What is it we are all after in life — what is the Ultima Thule of our souls, if we may still use that word? Desire to reach that is "the great hunger."

The story of Peer Holm is the pilgrimage of a man half-consciously traveling the long road to the Ultima Thule of his soul; passing unsatisfied the goals of knowledge, of power, of love, all

the milestones of a full life, and coming very late, very broken, but unconquered, to realization at the last.

This book could only have been written by a Scandinavian. It has the stark realistic spirituality characteristic of a race with special depths of darkness to contend with, and its own northern sunlight and beauty. A very deep love of Nature colors and freshens the work of this writer, and gives it that — I would not say national, but rather local — atmosphere and flavor which is the background of true art. For though art is the great live wire of communication between man and man, which knows not boundaries, all separate works of art are creations of individuals coming of special breeds, in special environments; and are just as distinctive as the flavors of wines, whose essential nourishment and uplift are one.

On our English imaginative literature only three foreign schools or currents of fiction and drama have had influence during the last half century — the French, the Russian, and the Scandinavian. A single writer from other countries here and there, such as d'Annunzio, Haupt-

mann, Sienkiewicz, Jokai, Maartens, has been read, but has had no deflecting power. How much, on the other hand, we have owed these last thirty years to the French fictionists — Dumas, Flaubert, De Maupassant, Anatole France; to the Russian — Turgeniev, Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, and Tchekov; to the Scandinavian — Ibsen, Björnson, Hamsun, and Strindberg, it would be impossible to unravel and discover.

Johan Bojer, with “The Great Hunger” now accessible to English readers, will assuredly swell the stream of Scandinavian influence on English fiction.

The texture of this work is firm and light, without *longueurs*. The book “marches,” and has a certain coherent unconventionality, without the extravagance which mars much belauded modern work. There is in it an essential clarity, a quality which cannot be overpraised, or over recommended to young writers. Its originalities of form do not jar, at least on me, who am, perhaps, over-sensitive in that matter. The translation is exceptionally able, and one would think that but little of the atmosphere has leaked away.

It is always a question in a novel which sets out to shadow forth a theme, or — shall we say? — a meditation, which has entranced its author, how far that theme or meditation will get precedence of the life and characters chosen to embody it. And, in reading this novel, so touchingly searching and sincere, there rises sometimes the feeling that Peer and Merle and the minor characters, clear and convincing though they are, lack not depth exactly nor individuality, but a certain intimacy and glow; and this, I think, is due to the absorption of their creator in the mood of discovery which begat the book. The theme is greater and more interesting to him and to his readers than the human material which embodies it. The scale tips a little in favor of the theme, but that is the only criticism I find to pass on a work which interested me from first page to last.

The story told, fine and pathetic, is common enough in this world of strenuous endeavor, accomplishment, and decline. Peer Holm, born and brought up in poverty, fights to educate himself, becomes a great engineer, and gains knowledge, wealth, power, and love; yet all the

time is dimly conscious of not having reached the heart of his own existence. He goes on reaching out, and loses again his health, his wealth, his power, till he becomes a broken man in a poverty as great as that from which he rose. It is only at the lowest ebb of his worldly fortunes that he finds satisfaction for his long hunger and reaches the Ultima Thule of his soul.

In the course of this pilgrimage all the formal stars are quenched, the customary shibboleths of happiness dispersed; accepted purposes of existence questioned and found wanting; God, as we have known Him, dismissed. Only when the waters, as it were, are closing over him does he read at last the riddle of human existence, which has been to him so starkly unanswerable all his life.

The final episode described in Peer's letter to his friend Klaus Brock is a fitting culmination, and the book ends on the top note of interest both in event and in that presentment of life which we call art.

I will not give that episode; for, without its context and all that goes before it, it might seem

unreal, even superhuman; but I would wish to quote in full two passages of the letter which narrates it: —

“I sat alone on the promontory of existence, with the sun and the stars gone out, and ice-cold emptiness above me, about me, and in me, on every side.

“. . . But then, my friend, by degrees it dawned on me that there was still something left. There was one little indomitable spark in me, that began to glow all by itself — it was as if I were lifted back to the first day of existence, and an eternal will rose up in me, and said: ‘Let there be light!’

“This will it was that, by-and-by, grew and grew in me, and made me strong. . . .

“I began to feel an unspeakable compassion for all men upon earth, and yet, in the last resort, I was proud that I was one of them.

“I understood how blind fate can strip and plunder us all, and yet something will remain in us at the last, that nothing in heaven or earth can vanquish.

“Our bodies are doomed to die, and our spirit to be extinguished, yet still we bear within us the



spark, the germ of our eternity, of harmony and light both for the world and for God.

“And I knew now that what I had hungered after in my best years was neither knowledge, nor honor, nor riches; nor to be a priest or a great creator in steel. No, my friend, what I had hungered after was to build a temple, not chapels for prayers or churches for waiting penitent sinners, but a temple for the human spirit in its grandeur, where we could lift up our souls in an anthem as a gift to heaven.” . . . “As for me — I did not do this thing for Christ’s sake, or because I loved my enemy, but because, standing upon the ruins of my life, I felt a vast responsibility. Mankind must arise and be better than the blind powers that order its ways; in the midst of its sorrows, it must take heed that the God-like does not die. The spark of eternity was once more aglow in me and said: ‘Let there be light.’ And more and more it came home to me that it is man himself that must create the divine in heaven and on earth — that that is his triumph over the dead omnipotence of the universe. Therefore I went out and

sowed the corn in my enemy's field that God might exist."

So the book ends with "the Great Hunger appeased."

A very fine work, both in execution and in meaning.

JOHN GALSWORTHY

## THE GREAT HUNGER

BY JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

THE tragic difficulty of novels unannounced by adventitious circumstance or stereotyped names is to find friends. They always exist, even in generous numbers for really fine writing, but they are scattered, and there is nothing in the exterior of a book to reassure the thoughtful and—of necessity—sceptical reader. Hundreds of “great” novels are published every season, novels surpassing Conrad’s or Hardy’s, easily “better than the Russians” at their own game; they are purchased with the hope—the vain hope—that they will at least fulfil a part of the advertised promise. But even this they fail to do, and a fresh assault is made on the same terms.

If, for example, Mr. Galsworthy had not departed from his invariable custom and written a public commendation of *The Great Hunger*, I probably should never have read it. The

quality of the review and of his personal pre-occupations, told me that it was not the special form of creative literature which most engages me; such turned out to be fact, but there was so much beauty, so much pure gold, in *The Great Hunger* that to follow Mr. Galsworthy's praise was not only a pleasure but an absolute duty.

I have spoken of the friends of a novel, and it will be immediately seen that, with the novels, they must vary very widely. The friends of one are not the friends of all: the adherents of Tarzan would form no warm attachment for Johan Bojer's book. It is common honesty here to admit that — in the accepted, yes, the vulgar, sense — it hasn't a happy ending. Naturally the popular human conception of a happy end is the acquisition of fame and fortune and what, conventionally, is called love. Of course it is not love, for there, too, a material symbol is insisted on — either physical beauty, money or an amazing chastity. Love is different from this, just as *The Great Hunger* is different from volumes catching up and re-echoing the stupid, lying formulas of a gilded and easy triumph.

Nothing, except the splendid passionate style,

of *The Great Hunger* is easy: Peer Holm, the illegitimate son of a captain and man of fashion, fights all his life for the successive objects of his ends, and usually, at the point of success, they dissolve into the slow dawning realization that they were only cold mist. At the last these veils, penetrated one by one in suffering, are put aside and Peer rises to victory . . . but it is solely a victory within himself — the clamorers for visible and impressive circumstance, like the dull villagers among whom Peer Holm finally became a blacksmith, will find unrelieved cause for dissatisfaction.

Like all novels true to the deeper qualities of Christ it will be a cause of annoyance to a world of fat comfort, where religion is conveniently held in an automatic and calendared observance. Here, discarding every deadening reassurance, a man is relentlessly drawn across the loud plain of life, through poverty, hunger and loneliness and loss, through triumph and riches — if this were transposed to the end all the requirements of wide popularity would be assured — sensual love, champagne, gay music and thronged parties. However, he moves on

into the darkness of utter material disaster and the most insidious suffering that men can endure.

Out of so much Peer emerges, a Peer wasted and streaked with gray, who has had to send his children to others for support; Peer, who harnessed the Nile, hammering the steel sparks into an obscure hut; with, at the last, only this for our reward — that he sows his bitter enemy's field with corn. Only this, but it is my foremost conviction, the foundation on which eventually everything else must rest, that it is the most radiantly happy end imaginable.

## II

When I mentioned that *The Great Hunger* was not precisely the type of novel to which my preference was addressed I meant and discovered that Johan Bojer had essentially a more optimistic mind than my own; there was in him the seriousness of a writer convinced that men were perfectable. This splendid feeling carries with it an irresistible responsibility — a duty outside the severe boundaries of my, it may well be less important, engagement. In this his novel

fulfils every conceivable obligation; it is an authentic document of heroic spirituality. Yet if it had been that alone I should never have undertaken to speak of it formally. How, acceptably, could I? *The Great Hunger* has another side, a quality of a different beauty, and about which, with encouragement, I could write interminably.

Just exactly what the beauty is I am unprepared, together with every one else who has given life to its mystery, to say. Yet it has such a tangible reality, so many men may discern it in common, that it is permissible to discuss it with only the faultiest understanding. But here, again, I am under an apparent disadvantage — I have no actual knowledge of the meaning of practically all the words used in critical efforts of this kind.

The reason for this may well be that I am not a critical writer, and that such an effort on my part can be no more than presumptuous. That has some truth, but not an overwhelming amount; on many sides the creative writer and the mere reader are closer to the core of a novel than the professional or temperamental critic.

This is a statement that I can affirm with a certain painful security. The stirring beauty of *The Great Hunger*, I am convinced, can be best expressed in terms of warm enthusiasm rather than from remote position of fixed detachment. It would perhaps be correct to say that it is clearest explained in phrases of its own kind.

Beauty, then, exists in it to a thrilling degree, the beauty that pinches the heart and interferes with breathing. It has the inexplicable loveliness that rare individuals possess, and which by no means can be accounted for in set conventional attributes. In the first place, it is the book of a singularly pure mind; not the opaque purity of a glazed white porcelain surface, but that of an undefiled revealing spaciousness; it is the book of a mind above any bribe or mitigating lie or quilted compromise. Consequently it is not a novel for the bribed, the liars, or the easily dogmatic. Its beauty, for recognition, demands something in the way of corresponding virtue.

My pleasure in it was incidental and unmoral, a delight in the simply vivified life of the passages: Peer, a country boy with his little chest



on his shoulder, comes to town and finds a boarding place for country folk; he is defrauded, for the moment, of his patrimony by a detestable individual, and sturdily sets to work, to work and grind and blunder through technical pages while youth is wandering through the summer evening streets:

“And in the evening he would stick his head out of his two paned window that looked on to the street and would see the lads and girls coming back, flushed and noisy, with flowers and green boughs in their hats, crazy with sunshine and fresh air.”

Impressed by a growing sense of responsibility, no more than a boy in a wretched shell of a room, he sends for his half sister, lonely like himself, and together, after some scant bread and butter and doubtful coffee, they drift happily from waking dreams to sleep:

“Well, good night, Louise.”

“Good night, Peer.”

Why this, in particular, should be beautiful I am unprepared to say; yet that pinching of the heart, the catch in breathing, were sudden and tyrannical. Such notes are only fragmentary,

but then anything beside the novel itself will be. There are many such irradiated episodes; yet I must admit that I found those at the beginning and the end the most irresistible. There is, curiously enough, something in the spectacle of material success fatal to the emotion I am attempting to indicate.

### III

The more serious aspects, those, at least, so generally regarded as more serious, of *The Great Hunger*, I must leave for discussion to abler abilities than mine. Mr. Galsworthy has already done it very perfectly. But no one could miss the utter charm of Bojer's girls and women. In spite of limitless protestations to the contrary, charming women are few in fiction; perhaps, though, no scarcer there than in life. Anyhow, their tenderness, their lovely shyness and poignant surrenders, the little vanities and wistful smiles and muslins, pervade Johan Bojer's pages.

Louise and Merle, the saeter girl that — after she has finished the milking — Peer kissed, vibrate with reality and appealing warmth. They

are drawn with the magic which is — to me — the supreme literary gift; they, and the moments in which they are presented:

“It was near midnight when he stood by the shore of a broad mountain lake, beneath a snow flecked hillside. . . . And, see — over the lake, that still mirrored the evening red, a boat appeared moving toward the island, and two white-sleeved girls sat at the oars, singing as they rowed. A strange feeling came over him. Here — here he would stay.”

“Peer . . . watched her as she stood in her long white gown before the toilet table with the little green shaded lamps, doing her hair for the night in a long plait. Neither of them spoke. He could see her face in the glass, and saw that her eyes were watching him, with a soft, mysterious glance — the scent of her hair seemed to fill the place with youth.”

And this, at the end:

“There by the fence stood Merle, looking at me. She had drawn a kerchief forward over her brow, after the fashion of the peasant women, so that her face was in shadow; but she smiled to me — as if she, too, the stricken mother, had

risen up from the ocean of her suffering that here, in the daybreak, she might take her share in the creating of God."

That, as I began by saying, will be widely regarded as an unhappy ending; but if Peer and Merle had been left standing on the terrace of their country house, looking down over their gardens and orchards and stables, if they had been left rich and arrogant and inert, all would have been well. As it is — the whisper of the only possible salvation, the utmost optimism — the public will shift uneasily, mutter or even impatiently protest, and turn with a sigh of forgetfulness and relief to the stupid formulas of a lying triumph.

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

# THE FACE OF THE WORLD

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

## I

WHAT Johan Bojer planned to make *The Face of the World* there is no way of telling. But as the volume stands it is a very handsome piece of irony; and its main character in particular is "rendered" in such a manner that all readers of this book will (I believe) remember Harold Mark for a long while, with (I sincerely trust) unuttered sentiments.

This Harold Mark the reader encounters as a newly graduated Norwegian doctor, contentedly married, and temporarily established in Paris, where his wife, Thora, is vaguely studying "art" at the Louvre and thereabouts. And the two were happy enough until Harold fell to thinking of a world he and his fellow creatures inhabited and began extending toward his fellow creatures a great, burning sympathy.

Now, as everybody knows, when Scandinavians once begin sympathizing they go further than the philanthropists of more abstemious races, who can take pity or leave it alone. Thus this great, burning sympathy at once demolished Harold's liking for Thora's art. "Looking at Veronese's beautiful women, he thought of the number of slaves there must have been to maintain such an article of luxury." He would even embarrass his wife by voicing such high reflections quite openly before strangers.

One day Harold and Thora were standing in front of David's picture of Napoleon's coronation. Thora was for saying the proper things and for enjoying all the proper reactions; but Harold's devastating contribution to esthetic criticism was to remark that Napoleon was "one of the world's greatest criminals" and to reflect "How far along the world would have been if only he had lost the battle of Lodi!"

Thora was startled, but she exhibited commendable self-restraint by turning silently away from him to converse with a Finnish sculptor who estimated the Louvre pictures by more customary touchstones.

Then came the evening when there was a public meeting in the *Place de la République* to protest against the massacre of the Jews in Kiev, and Harold was wishful to extend to these dead Jews his great, burning sympathy by standing in the crowd and hearing M. Anatole France deliver an address.

But Thora's feeling was that for them to stand in the crowd in all that rain would do small good to the dead Jews and a great deal of harm to her best clothes. So she undressed and went to bed. "Do you come too!" she urged. "And the candle threw a yellow light over the simple bed and her pretty young face, while the slender, warm body beneath the bedclothes made its appeal to him. She was full of the joyful present and wanted him to forget everything else."

So Harold took her hands in his and pressed them. "Listen, Thora," he said, "if you'll be good and let me go to that meeting this evening I'll go with you to the Louvre tomorrow."

Thora let him go. Later she very sensibly let him go for good and all and she married the Finnish sculptor who estimated the Louvre at its true value.

## II

Later still Harold Mark returned to Norway to practise medicine in Christiania. He was by this time a socialist, and, sinking gradually into yet murkier depths of mentality, became at last a prohibitionist. He spoke at labor demonstrations, wrote letters to the newspapers and (very gratifyingly) was sued and fined for his verbal assaults upon various liquor dealers in a land as yet unterrorized by an Anti-Saloon League. All this was due to Harold's continuing to think quite seriously about the world, which seemed to him in a very bad way indeed, and eminently deserving of his great, burning sympathy.

"I think," he wrote his mother, "about everything and everybody. My mind enlarges itself so as to embrace the whole world. Mankind becomes a seething ocean that rolls backwards and forwards through all my being. I grow dizzy with the feeling of infinity. Millions of cries for help rise from the hopeless confusion: I see a crowd of faces contorted with pain: arms are outstretched for help as from millions in danger of drowning. . . . Good Lord, mother!



If I could only get rid of this great, burning sympathy for everything and everybody!"

In fact, that does not seem to be a pleasant way of spending one's evenings: nor, after several years of thus enlarging his mind after supper, could Harold detect that his great, burning sympathy was being of any use to any specific person. In consequence, at about the time he is appointed senior physician of the seaside hospital at his birthplace, Dr. Mark resolves to focus all his great, burning sympathy upon "one human being who is unhappy"; and casting about for a likely victim decides that Ivar Holth, a partly insane ex-convict, has received from the town what is vernacularly describable as a pretty raw deal.

So Dr. Mark makes Holth the steward of Mark's hospital, and day after day, affords the former convict the full benefit of Harold Mark's companionship and great, burning sympathy.

There may be scoffers to suggest that it was Harold Mark's society which proved the last proverbial straw to Holth's weak mind. At all events Holth presently becomes violent and sets fire to a building which unpleasantly reminds

him of his past. Then the fire spreads, the whole town ignites with Scandinavian thoroughness, the hospital is destroyed and Harold Mark himself sustains severe bodily injuries.

### III

Mentally, too, Harold Mark is shaken as he lies abed and continues his serious thinking. "Behold," declares Harold Mark in effect, "I have tested man as an individual and see what comes of it! I put faith in my fellow creature and he has repaid my great, burning sympathy by burning down my hospital." To which, of course, the obvious answer would be that to place a mentally unbalanced person in a position of grave responsibility is not a test of anything except the full scope of your personal muddle-headedness.

Even so, the reader is delusively encouraged as Harold Mark continues his serious thinking: "You with the bleeding world's conscience, you stretch yourself upon the cross and suffer and bleed like a fool. You help no one." For the reader begins to hope that this Mark is on the

verge of discovering at least a fraction of the truth about Harold Mark, when, in the nick of need, the most gratifying uplifting reflections occur to the hurt dreamer concerning "the great dreamers of the past."

"A slave rises in Rome with a star on his brow: one of his disciples becomes emperor of the world. In Judæa the son of a carpenter stands with some fishermen round him and takes water out of a well. Over the Italy of the Renaissance rises a figure with a chisel in his hand; in England a poet builds a world throne. They were dreamers like you," says Harold Mark to himself with very moving modesty. "They were dreamers, and yet they are the torch bearers in the procession of mankind: and it is owing to them that there is not night over the world."

And that makes him quite happy.

Thus, finally, in wringing gladness from the reflection that, but for the strivings of dead dreamers, things might, you know, really have been much worse than they are, does Harold Mark attain to tranquil mental unison with that other eminent philosopher, Pollyanna. And the book ends with the reader comprehending that

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the already devastated town, and all Norway, and the face of the world at large, are doomed indefinitely to remain the objects of Dr. Mark's serious thinking and great, burning sympathy, once he is out of bed again.

#### IV

So much for this Dr. Harold Mark, whom Bojer has made the pivot of a big ironic book, very finely conceived and very finely executed. I have but outlined, with, it may be, improper levity, where Bojer meticulously "renders" — with, as I think, a loving malevolence — this man of average endowments who is dissatisfied with human life as it is now conducted, and as it has hitherto been conducted, and who is distrustful (having reason) of the circumambient and ambiguous universe.

"What does it all mean, and toward what is this disastrous muddle striving? — I do not know. What can I do about the incomprehensible huge mess? Why, nothing whatever: and indeed my efforts to do anything about it appear but to augment the discomfort of my fellow animal-

culæ. Very well, then! I will make the humiliation of my position endurable by tipsifying myself with optimistic verbiage and with uplifting drivel about what fine fellows are, at any rate, such an elect minority among mankind as Shakespeare and Christ and myself."

One cannot but think, be it repeated, that this portrait of a philanthropist has been etched with the acid of premeditated irony: though the publishers, to all appearance, would have you believe that Johan Bojer portrayed this Harold Mark with tender seriousness and whole-hearted admiration and, in a word, with the indorsement of Bojer's own "great, burning sympathy." One must respectfully question that. Yet, even should the case be such, the irony is none the less keen for being two-edged, nor is the portrait rendered a whit less impressive by any queer light thrown upon the painter. The volume as it stands may fairly be decreed a very handsome piece of irony either way.

## TREACHEROUS GROUND

BY CECIL ROBERTS

### *A Romantic Realist*

SOME years ago the first Bojer book found its way into my hands and a review resulted in a number of inquiries as to who Johan Bojer was and where he lived. It was hardly necessary to answer questions because there have been few authors of whom one feels that they write themselves into their books more than Bojer. You can trace the intellectual development of this Norwegian through intellectual revolt to romantic realism. It is no paradox to declare that he is a romantic realist. He writes of men who fail because they hold an ideal and unlike most idealists they scorn propaganda and experiment upon themselves. In *Treacherous Ground*, as in *The Great Hunger* or *The Power of a Lie* we encounter a hero who belittles himself and cultivates the luxury of

despair. Erik Evje is a socialist who does everything to provoke society against him. He disgraces a girl, fails in a promise to a friend, and is never so contemptible as when filled with contrition. Faced by the man he has wronged he flies home to the mother he has neglected and takes control of the estate. There he rewards the old family laborers with plots of land on the heights of the fiord. His conscience is eased by this sacrifice of his patrimony until a candid friend, otherwise an insincere enemy, warns him that the whole settlement is threatened with a landslide. "It sometimes happens, however, that a man who jokes and laughs has a little sore place upon his foot, which hurts at every step, although he thinks about other things and walks as if nothing was the matter. Erik Evje also had a little sore place. It was a secret fear that in spite of everything, there was something wrong up at Newland."

There is no truth so hard to run down as an unestablished one. A jealous engineer predicted a landslide, Evje, his wife and his settlers cannot believe it is true, because the truth seems treacherous to the ideal of a man who sought to

clear himself by self sacrifice. This is a theme such as Bojer delights in.

He stands forth among novelists because he champions the indifference of nature. An idealist builds a hospital and puts in charge of it an ex-convict who burns it down; a dreamer who has sinned against his fellows builds a new settlement and the land slides away with it. To the Socialist first God is a joke, then a joker, and the man seeking to establish himself in righteousness is walking on treacherous ground. Bojer's work is the study of the courage of men to battle long with life. Yet his work is never depressing, his heroes have the courage of despair and the consistency of the pessimist. Life cheats them by bringing them love where they were vowed to solitude, success where they predicted disaster, and hope, like a recurring decimal, pours through their sum total of things. There is no Blue Bird necromancy in Bojer's books, but he has the genius to show the ordinary man behaving in the ordinary way, yet fighting all the world because revolt seizes upon the third and fourth generation of them that reform us. When all Evje's world tumbles down



in the landslide, when the reformer's dream is shattered, when the little homes and their domestic romances sweep down to death, it is then that Bojer becomes lyrical and reveals, through a chapter of strong beauty, how one man, with a dream in his heart for long years, suddenly finds release in disaster. Stubborn, drunken Lars, like Evje, attempted to retrieve a mistake and married the woman he did not love. He toils on the landslide to find the body of the woman he loves, lightly ignoring the mother who dies in an heroic attempt to save her children. A beast, he has the faithfulness of a beast, so he is happiest when he is driving the body of his beloved through the snow to its last sleeping place. Where most of us would see only the cynic, the unfaithful husband, Bojer sees the inability of the heart to effect a compromise. It is a lyrical close to a symphony of disaster.

"He passed the houses and entered a wood white with snow, and here the little bell on the horse's chest rang out clear and melodious, like an old ballad. Presently a red full moon peeped out above the snow-white mountain tops, reminding him of the time when he wandered

about alone up there on the pale moors as a goat-herd, and had poured forth from his horn all that moved and sounded in his brain. And almost unconsciously, as he sat he put it all together — the recollection of the prettiest voice in the church, the slender waist, a uniform, of which nothing would ever come now, and the girl in the coffin, perhaps still silently weeping — it all seemed to grow together into a long forgotten wordless song.”

*Here we see the courage of a romantic realist. He finds music in disaster, out of defeat sings the human heart at war with life. It is this courage to write as life writes on the human mind which makes Bojer not only a novelist of power but a maker of books that challenge the intellect.*

THE END

## WORKS OF JOHAN BOJER

### NOVELS

Helga  
The Procession  
The Eternal Strife  
Mother Lea  
A Pilgrim's Way  
The Prisoner Who Sang  
God and Woman. (Dyrendal). (To be published  
in America in 1921)  
The Great Hunger (Published in America,  
January 15, 1919)  
The Face of the World (Published in America,  
September 10, 1919)  
Treacherous Ground (Published in America,  
March 5, 1920)  
The Power of a Lie (Published in America,  
June 10, 1920)  
Life (To be published in America, October 15, 1920)

### SHORT STORIES

When the Cuckoo Sang (To be published in  
America, Fall, 1920)  
The Fisherman's Christmas (To be published  
in America, Fall, 1920)  
Skobelef (To be published in America, Fall, 1920)  
Fisherman  
Pan  
Old Tales

### PLAYS

The Eyes of Love (To be produced in New York,  
Fall, 1920)  
The Power of a Lie (To be produced in New  
York, Fall, 1920)  
Sigurd Braa  
A Mother  
Marie Walewska  
St. Olaf  
The Burial Mound  
Brutus  
Theodora  
Island of the Dead

### FAIRY TALES

At the Churchyard Gate  
The Wind in the Reeds  
White Birds  
In the Isle of Remembrance  
The Fireweed

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